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IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Joseph Francis Backlanadan



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Love in the Life & Works of Mahatma Gandhi

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Preface

It may surprise some that I had to come so far away from India to study the works of Mahatma Gandhi. Would it not have been better to do such a study in India itself where Gandhi's work matured and where his experiments concluded so very abruptly? Personally, I think, a study such as this, done in a foreign country, has certain advantages which would be absent back at home. Foremost among these considerations is the fact that Gandhi had contact with the West, especially during his Law studies in England, exactly a hundred years ago and his weapon of *satyāgraha* was forged in South Africa. A further reflection is the curious phenomenon that when we distance ourselves from a place and situation, we are better prepared to pass an impartial judgment, without being led away by blind enthusiasm or intense aversion. In fact, my own view of Gandhi underwent a change in the course of the study and many an earlier, false impression was cleared away.

My promotor wisely set me the task of going through all the writings, speeches and letters of Mahatma Gandhi but after having spent more than two years at this task, I was dismayed to find the following entry in **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi**, vol. LXXXI:

I don't believe that you can serve India better by studying abroad. To think this is sheer ignorance. To feel that education abroad is the best betrays ignorance. I do not give my blessings to those who wish to study abroad.

Letter to Anand Sundaram, September 26, 1945,
in CW LXXXI (1945) no. 497, p. 282.

But I was consoled when, two weeks later, I reached vol. LXXXIV. There was a reply of Gandhi to Press Correspondents who had asked him whether he would advise India's sons to be sent abroad for studies when India gets her independence:

No, not just now. I would advise her to send them there only after, say, 40 years.

May 28, 1946, in CW LXXXIV (1946) no. 288, p. 277.

My joy was all the greater because, by a fortuitous coincidence, I had come to the West only after nearly 40 years had elapsed since independence.

It is but right that I should record my thanks to my wise promotor Prof. B. Willaert who encouraged and guided my work. My thanks are due

to all the other professors, at the faculty of theology, whose classes I attended.

This study, at the prestigious Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, was made possible by the grant of study leave by St. Peter's Seminary, Bangalore, India and the generous scholarship provided by the faculty of theology, here at Leuven. My thanks go to the Registrar of the faculty of theology, his team at the secretariat and the study advisor for their generous service. A special thanks are due to the Librarian and his team at the faculty library and to Mr. Babu, the Librarian at the Indian embassy, Brussels (where I found a good collection of books on Gandhi) for their cooperation.

Backianadan Joseph Francis
Leuven, May 1989

Introduction

Hundreds of books in very many languages have been written about M.K. Gandhi, popularly known in India and elsewhere as Mahatma Gandhi. Countless articles have been written about his life and works. They have not come to an end as yet and fresh books and articles keep coming out. Newer vistas are opening out for an interpretation of his ideas.

For our study I have chosen a question which may be controversial to some; the answers would be too obvious to be controversial to others and to still others the whole thing would be an irrelevant and useless question. The question itself is not new but the answer that we expect to derive from M.K. Gandhi, I hope, would give a new colour and depth to the answer.

The question that faces us seems to be simple enough at the outset but in fact it is complex and a crop of questions rise in its wake. The answer to one set determines the answer to others in a chain reaction. The question is: the love of God and neighbour, are they identical? M.L. Taylor seems to think that K. Rahner so identified them:

The importance of this identification of the love of God and the love of neighbour in Rahner's thought cannot be overestimated. In this identification of love of God and love of neighbour one has reached the high point, the one final summation of Rahner's theological anthropology.¹

But some one like Maurice Wiles reflecting over the use made of Mt 25:31-46 would be cautious about making or speaking about any strict identity, though the two are inseparably connected: "The form of identity is certainly no strict identity. To treat it as such and so regard love of neighbour as coterminous with and indistinguishable from love of God is dangerously misleading".² Again the tendency to identification is at times a temptation to oversimplifying something that is complex, wherein the terms of complexity would have to be kept without downgrading one or the other. It is a suppression of either that leads to falsity. At the same time, it involves a

¹ TAYLOR, M.L., *God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner*, Atlanta, 1986, p. 86.

² WILES, M., *Faith and the Mystery of God*, London, 1982, p. 47.

false reading of the natures of God and man. Thus James Moffat makes this interesting statement:

... their [mystics'] philosophy of spiritual life was frequently based on an inadequate idea of personality, and upon a conception of God which made love for Him a refined passion for the Absolute rather than a devotion to the will of God as that is revealed in the active duties and relationships of life ... To love the Lord is misconceived if it is imagined that one remembers Him better by forgetting others at our side.³

If then any strict identification is to be eschewed and the two terms are to be kept and understood as inviolable persons, how are they related? There is however a danger here when the enquirer posits himself, unconsciously, as the third who is standing in front of the two, i.e. before God and fellowman. All along, the enquirer should remember that he is one with his fellowmen whether he likes it or not. So the enquirer has to proceed from his self-consciousness as well as from extraneous data. Immediately then, we become conscious of the value of our fellowmen and consequently of our own value through inter-communion. Now this value perception prevents me from using my fellowmen as instruments for something else, which to say the least, is demeaning the person. M.G. Nédoncelle has this to say: "The lover ... does not desire the other as an instrument to be subordinated to his use, but as an end that is equal or perhaps superior to himself".⁴ So even if the goal of my aspirations and actions is love of God, I cannot love my neighbour so that I may love God. This would mean downgrading the personhood of my neighbour. Can we then go the other way round and say that we love God because we want to love our neighbour? In this case we would be using God as an instrument or perhaps, at times, an excuse. Then again the two terms are not equal in nature but only analogous, where one is the Principal Analogue and the other is secondary Analogate. However, both are persons and so a relation of love can exist. As such there cannot be a question of using one or the other. If it were so, then it would no more be a question of love.

The normal solution given for this problem is that we do not suppress either term through a strict identity but only speak of a close connec-

³ MOFFAT, J., *Love in the New Testament*, London, 1929, p. 27.

⁴ NÉDONCELLE, M.G., "Love and the Person", in (Dollen, J.C., et al., eds.), *The Catholic Tradition, Personal Ethics*, Vol. I, USA, 1979, p. 391.

tion between the two, where one implies the other with a consequent necessity. The real absence of either would necessarily call into question one's profession of love and loyalty. We speak of a loyalty because it means a loyalty to God, not forgetting the loyalty we owe our neighbour as well. Love for God and a love for fellowmen is to be kept in a polar tension or a constant dialectical tension where we move constantly from one to the other, whereby we are constantly corrected by one or the other.

This study will attempt at seeing from M.K. Gandhi's life and works an answer to this problem. Would the answer be different? At the very outset, let it be clearly mentioned, as many others too have noted, that M.K. Gandhi is not a systematic philosopher or a theologian but a practical man with a practical sense.⁵ He possessed what an average Indian possesses, namely, a practical philosophy of life, unformulated and unconscious perhaps but manifest in attitudes and way of life. However, his synthesis was unique. His contacts with the West did not bowl him over but acted as a catalyst to discover what was hidden in his own cultural heritage and bring it to the fore, not in any systematic thesis but in concrete action.

M.K. Gandhi presents for us a complex personality. Often he was and is still misunderstood and misinterpreted. For some, he is a deeply religious man; for others only a political schemer who should have retired to the Himalayas if he were truly a religious man; for still others he was a crank with funny ideas about nature cures and dietary experiments; some considered him to be a psychopath with guilt feelings about sex, advocating continence even for married couples except when they wanted to beget chil-

⁵ Thus, for example, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the First President of the Indian Republic in his "Homage", written on January 16, 1958, for the beginning of the series: **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi** (which was to run into more than 88 volumes and long after Dr. Rajendra Prasad's death), notes aptly: "Mahatma Gandhi did not set out to evolve a philosophy of life or formulate a system of beliefs or ideals. He had probably neither the inclination nor the time to do so ... It will be for the students and thinkers to do what Mahatma Gandhi never attempted. With all the materials thus made available [in the **Collected Works** ...], they will be able to formulate, as it were, in the form of thesis his philosophy of life, his teachings, his ideas and programmes, and his views on the innumerable problems which arise in life, in a logical and philosophical manner and classified under different heads and categories". **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi**, Vol. I (1884-1896), New Delhi, The Publications Division, Government of India, 1958, 2nd ed. 1969, p. v-vi.

Please note well that this work is hereafter abbreviated to CW and the year or years noted within the brackets denote the period dealt with in the volume, so that the reader can easily understand the value or otherwise of a particular quote.

dren to continue the species; some are astounded by his apparent inconsistency in advocating *ahimsā* (non-violence) and yet recruiting soldiers for World War I; while Christians could not understand his working towards Hindu-Muslim unity, preaching toleration for all religions but then resolutely opposing all their proselytizing work; he was found to be enthusiastic for the upliftment of the untouchables, remarriage of child widows, a raise in the marriageable age for couples, an end to the drink evil and protection of cows; modern economists are not convinced by his obscurantist opposition to rapid industrialization and his advocacy of the old spinning wheel and the wearing of the rough hand-spun cotton cloth; he appeared at times to be weak-kneed, not pressing for the advantage when he had the enthusiasm of the whole nation to back him.⁶ All these and many more criticisms and questions were raised in his own life time. He did not flinch even for a moment but answered each one patiently.

His life seems to be a failure. Most of what he had advocated has already been given the long slip by modern India.⁷ M.K. Gandhi seems to be sadly out of tune. Not long ago, even his statue was beheaded in Calcutta by a radical group of Marxists, known as Naxalites. Even some noted Indian historians have not hesitated to call into question the myth that India obtained its freedom solely through the method of non-violence by Gandhi. They would rather say that India obtained her freedom through various other causes, not the least being the fact of World War II and the increasing disaffection and rebellions among the Indian people and the violence of Hindu-Muslim riots, all of which made Britain to leave the sub-continent to its own fate as being no longer governable. Britain certainly did not go away converted and repenting for all the wrongs that it had done to the Indian

⁶ Cf. BUULTJENS, R., "Another Side of Gandhi", in *America* 148 (April 1983) 274-278, p. 274, where he notes: "... Gandhi was deeply paradoxical and often a tormented character. His person and personality blended luminous sincerity and commitment to principle with idiosyncratic personal behaviour, autocratic tendencies in political and private life and many unrealistic visions and approaches to the socioeconomic problems of India and the world".

⁷ Thus modern India has gone in for rapid industrialization, modernization of its army which has already fought four wars with the neighbouring Pakistan and one with China. Prohibition, introduced at one time practically throughout India, is now found only in a few states. Wrong use is made of hunger-strikes and agitational tactics are employed which their votaries wrongly imagine as Gandhian. Cf. what a celebrated author has noted as far back as 1963: PANIKKAR, K.M., *The Foundation of New India*, London, 1963, p. 179-188.

people, as M.K. Gandhi had expected! They point out that towards the end, leaders close to Gandhi did not even consult him but took decisions in spite of him. They paid only a lip service of being loyal to him and kept him humoured because of the image of saintliness that had grown round him. They would aver that for Gandhi the independence of India was secondary and he was looking forward to something that was impossible for the ordinary people.⁸ Hence his influence was not for the best and political independence was late in coming due to his many blunders in tactics.⁹ And yet India and the world has not seen the last of him as yet. Gandhian methods of campaign for liberation and obtaining of justice have been used by many others in other countries and in other situations.¹⁰ Some examples could be: Martin Luther King and his campaign for black rights in the U.S.A.; anti-Vietnam war campaigns in America and Australia; Danilo Dolci's non-violent struggle for the poor in Sicily; initiatives of the Christian Churches in South Africa; anti-nuclear peace marches in many a country. His influence on other advocates of non-violence is considerable. Thus Thomas Merton was much influenced by him in this respect.¹¹ Gandhi however remained a humble man throughout his life. He would not take any credit for his achievements. Thus in a letter to one of his followers, he writes from his prison:

*Great men seem to be the cause of revolutions in the world. In truth the people themselves are the cause. Revolutions do not take place by accident but obey laws as rigid as the law governing the motions of the planets. Only we do not know those laws and causes and, therefore, regard revolutions as accidents.*¹²

⁸ Cf. MAJUMDAR, R.C., **History of the Freedom Movement in India**, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1963, Preface, p. xv-xxvii, especially p. xxiii.

⁹ Cf. OWEN, H.F., "The Nationalist Movement", in (Basham, A.L., ed.), **A Cultural History of India**, Oxford, 1975, p. 403-405.

¹⁰ Cf. JESUDASAN, I., **A Gandhian theology of Liberation**, New York, 1984; unabridged edition by Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand (India), 1987.

Also interesting are attempts to show that Gandhian emphasis on rural self-sufficiency and interests in ecological balances are not so out-moded after all: cf. PATEL, P.J. & SYKES, Marjorie, **Gandhi: His Gift of the Fight**, Rasulia, Hoshangabad (India), 1987.

¹¹ Cf. GIVEY, D.W., **The Social Thought of Thomas Merton**, Chicago, 1983, p. 60: "No adequate understanding of Thomas Merton's Christian ethic of non-violence is possible without an appreciation of the non-violence taught and lived by Mahatma Gandhi. For Merton, Gandhi embodied the basic principles of the way of non-violence and pointed the way to the uncompromising commitment demanded by the practice of true non-violence".

¹² Letter to Premabehn Katak on January 1, 1931, in CW XLV (1930-1931) no. 131, p. 95.

There is a plethora of biographies and articles on Mahatma Gandhi. After reading two biographies and two or three articles, I laid them aside to avoid being prejudiced in my view of Gandhi. Laboriously I went through all the 88 volumes of the series: **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi**, which contain all his speeches, letters, articles and books arranged in chronological order. This provided for me an excellent fare and a feel of the times Gandhi passed through. Some of the myths that had grown around Gandhi and which had gripped me (being a child of his times during his last stage) began to melt away and be 'demythologized', enabling me to catch a glimpse of the real Gandhi. In citing **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi** (abbreviated CW), I have noted in bracket the year to which a particular volume refers so that the reader could perceive clearly the particular stage and circumstances surrounding the citing. I have also pointed out whether it is a letter or speech and frequently I have indicated the source because some of these are in languages other than English: thus while **Young India**, **Harijan**, **The Hindu** are in English, **Harijanbandhu**, **Navajivan** are in Gujarati with their counterparts in Hindi, noted as **Hindi Navajivan** and **Harijan Sevak**; **Aaj** is also in Hindi and **Amrita Bazar Patrika** is in Bengali. It is also to be noted that the originals of many a letter is in Gujarati or Hindustani. Please note that both in the originals and in **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi**, there are no diacritical marks. I have introduced them for the convenience of the reader. In transcribing Sanskrit into Roman characters, the system established by the International Congress of Orientalists, Athens, 1912, is followed. CW vol. LXXXVIII ends with July 1947 and for an account of the remaining six months, I have depended on the huge volume II of Pyarelal's (Gandhi's personal secretary) **Mahatma Gandhi, The Last Phase**,¹³ **Delhi Diary**,¹⁴ containing an account of Gandhi's prayer service speeches from September 1947 till his death; and other biographical accounts. All these do not mean that I have totally neglected the many works on Gandhi. Subsequent reading of both books and articles on Mahatma Gandhi, enabled me to check and counter-check my conclusions. Much of what these books and articles contained were repetitions; a good many confirmed my conclusions, though the emphases differed. Not many of the studies I consulted, divided the matter according to

¹³ PYARELAL, **Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase**, Vol. II, Ahmedabad, 1958.

¹⁴ GANDHI, M.K., **Delhi Diary**, Ahmedabad, 1948.

chronological stages and hardly any took up the study of Gandhian concepts according to their step by step development. In order to study a progression of some of his concepts, I have divided the life of M.K. Gandhi into four stages: the first stage leads upto the final return of M.K. Gandhi to India in 1915. This was the period of his studies and the formative experiences in South Africa; the second stage ranges from the year of silence imposed by his political mentor G.K. Gokhale in 1915 upto the end of his self-imposed political silence for one year during 1926; the third stage brings us to the time of his last imprisonment in 1942; the final stage would be a brief coverage upto the time he was shot dead on January 30, 1948 by a Hindu fanatic, Nathuram Godse. I have included brief biographical sketches at the beginning of each stage since these would help in the right understanding of some of his ideas at a particular stage. The reader would find some unavoidable repetition but these are designed in such a fashion that the reader would be enabled to perceive the development of his ideas, through the various stages, though his basic idea of a search for Truth and commitment to Truth with *ahimsā* (non-violence, love-force) as a means to reach the fullness of Truth, remains the same. One cannot, however, deny that the passage of time and the different circumstances enable him to deepen his basic thought. It is also very curious to realize that the Gandhian thought-pattern is so involved and intricate that an adequate consideration of one element to the exclusion of others is a near impossibility. I had set out to extract only the elements needed for my dissertation but pulling out one thread of the fabric meant unravelling the whole. Thus the casual reader, who reads at random, may wonder how one element fits in with another but a patient, thoughtful reading would provide the clues to the kaleidoscopic thought-patterns of M.K. Gandhi.

Perhaps, it is in order, to make a few remarks about the chronological stages I have introduced in this study. Stages I and II are logical stages that immediately suggest themselves whereas Stage III which stretches from 1927 to 1942, is not homogeneous. Stage III could be further divided into three sub-sections, e.g. a^o from 1927-1932 including the historical Salt *Satyāgraha* of 1930, the subsequent Round Table Conference at London in 1931 and ending in his imprisonment in 1932; b^o the political lull between 1933 to 1937 when he was engaged in 'constructive' tasks; c^o the political turmoil from 1938 to 1942. Such a division, though interesting in itself, becomes cumbersome to our study and since there is no notable growth in his fundamental concepts between these sub-stages, I have clubbed them all into one developmental stage.

Regarding the division into various articles under each stage, the titles represent the frame-work, I felt, was appropriate while analyzing the data collected. The same frame-work is employed for all the chronological stages in order to note any development in the concepts. A quick look at the table of contents would enable the reader to have a bird's-eye view of the frame-work I have employed. I have no justification for this frame-work beyond what the data themselves suggested to me. Perhaps someone else would employ a different frame-work but I am almost sure that the conclusions would be about the same. What I have presented is only a perspective which is meaningful to me. I have also added a final chapter, summing up the dissertation, with a minimum of critical remarks and left it open-ended because the story is not yet over. What could be further seen is the way in which Gandhi's thoughts could affect, by vibration, Western concepts on this theme. What is also left to be completed in future is how these Gandhian insights could be integrated within the upcoming Indian Christian theology, expressed through Indian philosophical categories. Thus I have deliberately restricted myself to the understanding of Gandhian concepts on the chosen theme without prejudicing any future appropriation of these into an Indian Christian theology. However, it is to be noted that there are some in India who question the validity of an Indian theology, since they consider that theology is one. For me, in the light of Vatican II, it appears to be beyond question that Christian faith does not belong to any one culture or people exclusively. An Indian Christian theology is not a radical variant in the content but rather variant in its expression and it offers an added perspective which enriches the human understanding of God's self-communication, whatever be the way God chooses to communicate Himself. Eastern or Western, each mode of thought, while it is understood within itself, is to be open to let new waves to affect its self-understanding without being destroyed or conquered. M.K. Gandhi is a good example of one who learnt much from his Western contact but expressed himself in Indian concepts and never tried to violate the one or the other.

Instead of an exhaustive bibliography (too vast for enumeration), I have given a select bibliography with ample material for anyone who cares to read further. All the works mentioned in the bibliography do not figure in the dissertation since most of them appear to be repetitions. For the facility of the reader who may not be familiar with Sanskrit and other Indian languages, a glossary of such words used is appended at the end.

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Chapter I

The first stage:

From silence to eloquence 1869-1915

This chapter deals with the early part of M.K. Gandhi's life, including the important experiential formation he had in South Africa. Without such an experience, his vocation in life would perhaps have been different. We find here the beginnings of an honest search for Truth, a search which would continue all his life long.

I. The historical background and biographical notes

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 at Porbandar, a small town in Kathiawar Peninsula on the Western coast of India and today it is part of the Gujarat State. At the time of his birth, India as a whole was under the British rule or suzerainty. The greater portion was under their direct rule, divided into Provinces, governed by Governors responsible to the Viceroy at Delhi. There were many native princes, Maharajas and Rajas with territories: large, small, and tiny. These rulers had some measure of autonomy but under the British rule, and a British Resident kept a constant watch and control. Porbander was a tiny native territory, and M.K. Gandhi's father was the prime-minister to the local Raja. Sometime later, the family moved to neighbouring Rajkot and M.K. Gandhi's father became the prime-minister to the Raja of Rajkot. In 1876, Mohandas entered the primary school at Rajkot, and in the same year he was betrothed to Kasturbai, when he was barely 7 years old. In 1881 he entered Alfred High School at Rajkot, and that year saw his marriage at the age of 12; and his wife Kasturbai was of a similar age. One year of schooling was lost due to all the preparations and celebrations for the marriage. During his high school days, he tried meat-eating due to the encouragement from one of his friends and due to his mistaken idea that it would make him strong. He soon gave it up to avoid deceiving his elders. His religious feelings at this stage were indifferent and at times even verged on unbelief, but his mother's example and his nurse's counsel to repeat the name of Rama to overcome the fear he had of ghosts, enabled him to keep steady. In 1887 he passed the matriculation exam and joined Samaldas College at Bhavnagar, some distance away. The studies there did not interest him and he found

them too difficult. His father had already died, and now he got permission from his mother to go to England for law studies so that on return he would be able to take up tasks similar to his father's. His mother allowed him to go after obtaining from him a solemn promise to keep away from wine, women and meat. M.K. Gandhi honestly kept these promises despite many difficulties.

In spite of the ostracism of his caste, the *Banias* (traders), he set sail for England and landed there on October, 28, 1888. He registered himself as a student of law at the Inner Temple and started to acquaint himself with the society there. It was the late Victorian Age with all its snobbery and an Indian like him could only move on the fringes of society. To make up for this, he decided to become an 'English Gentleman' and started to learn elocution, French, dancing and Western music. All these did not last long. He gave them up and became interested in Theosophic society; and due to the Theosophists, he began to read the *Gītā* for the first time (an English translation) and this was to prove a lasting solace for him. He also read the Bible: the Old Testament bored him but the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount attracted him immensely. At the same time, he came in contact with vegetarian societies, read their magazines and attended their meetings, becoming towards the end a member of the executive committee. He joined enthusiastically in various dietary experiments and simplified his life. On the 10th of June, 1891, he passed the law exam; on the 11th, he enrolled his name in the High Court, and on the following day set sail for India. On arrival, he heard that his mother had died some time ago. This was a big shock for him. He purified himself ritually from the taint of foreign travel and got himself re-admitted into his caste. For nearly two years he tried his hand at law practice, both at Rajkot and Bombay, but did not succeed due to his extreme shyness and inability to speak in public. So, when the opportunity presented itself in April 1893 to go to Durban, South Africa on a short one year contract for some legal work with the firm of Dada Abdulla & Co., he eagerly took it up. In South Africa, in the course of his work he became acutely aware of the many indignities suffered by Indians who were forbidden to walk on footpaths or travel in first class (he was kicked off a footpath and thrown out of a train and off a coach). If it is only circumstances that were needed to bring out the best in him, these did. Gandhi lost all his shyness and became a bold defender of Truth and Justice. Incidentally, it was this year that he faced many a religious question that rose in his mind. Meanwhile he succeeded in bringing to a happy conclusion the legal

work that had been entrusted to him. On the eve of his return, a farewell party was arranged. It was then that he came across in a local newspaper, **The Natal Mercury**, the plan of the government to disenfranchise the Indians. He spoke of it to the assembly of merchants saying that they ought to do something about it. Their reply was that they could not do anything since they lacked the expertise. On their insistence he agreed to extend his stay by one month and the farewell party became a meeting for the plan of action. The stipulated one-month's stay, however, extended to two long years. He maintained himself by legal work and did the community work as a free service. During this time, he read Tolstoy's **The Kingdom of God is within You** which profoundly influenced his thoughts. He is supposed to have told his friend, Rev. Joseph Doke (sometime before 1909) that the sermon on the mount and the New Testament counsel to love one's enemies and not to return evil for evil, moved him to joy: "I was simply overjoyed, and found my own opinion confirmed where I least expected it. The **Baghavad Gītā** deepened the impression, and Tolstoy's **The Kingdom of God is Within You** gave it permanent form".¹ He entered into a correspondence with Tolstoy and always had a great respect for him.

In 1896, he returned to India for a brief spell and was commissioned to represent the Indian Community's plight to the Government and the people of India. Reuter did him a great disservice by sending a hurtful and inaccurate summary of his speech and statements, which came to be published in South African papers with the result that when he returned in 1897 to Durban, he was almost lynched and barely escaped with his life. The next four years he spent organizing the Indian community and appearing in court on their behalf in many a case. During this time he proved the loyalty and pluck of the community by organizing an Indian Ambulance Corps during the Boer War and worked within the line of firing. But for all this, the Indian disabilities continued especially in the matter of trading licences and the prohibition from entering Transvaal. At the end of 1901, he again returned to India but with the promise to return in one year's time, if the community needed him. On this occasion he and his family received very costly presents but he returned them all and made them into a trust for the

¹ DOKE, J.J., **M.K. Gandhi**, Madras, 1909, p. 88, as quoted in NANDA, B.R., **Mahatma Gandhi**, London, 1958, p. 95-96.

benefit of the community. He felt that since he had taken up these tasks for the community as a service, he ought not to receive any reward.

True enough, the community needed him and he returned at the end of 1902 and remained till 1914. This period saw the prolonged struggle of the community to win their basic rights and above all the respect due to them as human beings. In 1903, he began the long campaign against the £3 registration tax on freed indentured labourers. In 1904, he took over the publication of a paper, **The Indian Opinion**, and through this he tried to ventilate his ideas and educate the community. It was during one of his journeys from Johannesburg to Durban that he read Ruskin's book, **Unto this Last**, and this profoundly changed his life. He resolved to set up a simple colony of dedicated workers according to Ruskin's ideas. He bought a farm 20 miles from Durban and moved his press there and started his community living with a band of few dedicated workers. In March 1906, there was one more chance of proving the loyalty of the Indian Community. The Zulu rebellion had broken out and he organized and served in a Stretcher-Bearer Corps. It was during these long marches that Gandhi realized the need for a vow of celibacy if he were to be fully at the service of the community. Accordingly, at the age of 37 he took the vow of celibacy. Meanwhile, the Government had not stopped, in any way, its programme to control, contain, and if possible, to get rid of the Indians from South Africa. They wanted them only as indentured labourers and not as free citizens. So a new compulsory registration law was passed in spite of the representations and protests of the community. Its compulsory and discriminatory nature greatly incensed the community, and at a historical meeting at the Empire Theatre on September 1906, the community vowed not to obey the Registration Act. In December, Gandhi formed a Passive Resistance Association to conduct his non-violent campaigns. Harassments and arrests followed. He, too, was jailed in January 1908 but a compromise with Gen. Smuts was arrived at due to the latter's initiative, whereby if the Indians voluntarily registered themselves, the law would be withdrawn. With that assurance, he suspended the agitation and voluntarily registered himself, not however before a member of the community had physically assaulted him, wounding him severely because he considered that Gandhi had broken his oath. After seven months, when the legislation was not withdrawn and Smuts had thus broken the agreement, Gandhi and the other members of the community publicly burnt their new registration certificates. Gandhi recommenced his non-violent resistance to the Government but soon the enthusiasm waned, though a few

Satyāgrahis (non-violent, passive resisters)² kept going to the gaols thus keeping the movement alive. In 1910 he started Tolstoy Farm which was close to the Transvaal border where the *Satyāgrahis* used to be gaoled. He started this farm in order to maintain the families of the *Satyāgrahis* and make them work and earn their own keep, rather than receive doles. He reduced his legal practice and in course of time, gave it up, to concentrate his life and activities on this farm and from this farm to lead, guide and sustain the community in its struggle. He undertook many dietary experiments along with Mr. H. Kallenbach, a German architect who had given him the farm site free of rent.

The crucial stage of the struggle was reached in 1913 when the Government, by an Act, derecognized the Indian marriages not registered before civil authorities. With this, Indian women entered the fray. Indian mine labourers also joined in and the historic *satyāgraha* march to enter Transvaal illegally, began on October 29, 1913. The community underwent many a trial and much pain was endured. Gandhi was again arrested. In 1914, Gen. Smuts finally relented and peace was restored. The £3 tax was removed, compulsory registration was cancelled and with that Gandhi felt that his work in Africa was done. He left South Africa in July, intending to return via London. As his ship approached England, news reached of the outbreak of World War I. He stayed in England to organize an Indian voluntary medical corps. But he himself fell ill and could not be on the team and on medical advice set sail for India. He arrived in January 1915 at Bombay to a tumultuous welcome of a hero. But Gokhale, one of the leading political figures at that time, and a self-appointed mentor of Gandhi, advised him to spend a year of political silence, observing the situation in India. He obeyed and spent the year travelling over India in class III compartments and closely observed the situations in the country. Meanwhile, his political mentor, Gokhale, was dead. The stage was set for Gandhi to act but we shall deal with that in stage II.

A word about various influences on his life: among the books that influenced him, the *Gītā* (*Bhagavad Gītā*) holds the primary place. He read it first in English translation, in England and later in the original Sanskrit in

² See the explanation of the terms *satyāgraha*, *ahimsā* at their appropriate places where they are explained at length.

South Africa, and memorized the verses. In his **Autobiography**, he confesses:

*The Gītā became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meaning of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for ready solutions of all my troubles and trials.*³

Of his attraction towards the New Testament's teaching on love of enemies and especially the Sermon on the Mount, we have already noted above. But let it be understood, that for him, this only represented the confirmation of what the *Gītā* already teaches. Of the other books and persons who influenced him, he himself confesses in a preface to a book **Shrimad Raichandra** thus: "Three persons have influenced me deeply, Tolstoy, Ruskin and Raychandbhai: Tolstoy through one of his books and through a little correspondence with him, Ruskin through one book of his **Unto this Last ...**, and Raychandbhai through intimate personal contact".⁴ And he goes on to write how in 1893 he felt attracted towards Christianity and in this troubled state corresponded with many in England and India, especially with Raychandbhai who finally restored the balance and he discovered the value of his own Hindu tradition, and found no need to change his religious allegiance.

The last word about the influences in his life must be left to him, for in a reply to a revolutionary who had sent in a scathing attack saying that his teaching on non-violence is nothing but a mixture of Tolstoy and Buddha, he responds patiently and concludes with these words: "... the source of my inspiration is of no consequence if what I stand for be the unadulterated truth".⁵

³ GANDHI, M.K., **An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth**, (trans. from Gujarati by Mahadev Desai), London, Phoenix Press, 1949, p. 221, part IV, ch. V. This work will hereafter be abbreviated **Autobiography**. The part and chapter references are given since there are many different editions and publications, e.g. in **CW XXXIX** (1929) no. 1. Originally, they appeared weekly in **Navajivan** from 1925-1929.

⁴ **Young India**, February 12, 1925, in **CW XXXII** (1926-1927) no. 1, p. 4.

⁵ **CW XXVI** (1925) no. 62, p. 140.

II. A genuine search for God

M.K. Gandhi's life has been a life of genuine search. This is how he saw his life, and that is why he sub-titled his **Autobiography** as **The story of my Experiments with Truth**.⁶ He was constantly experimenting in this his search. He never considered that he had reached the goal. As he went forward, it seemed to go further and further. Truth could not be grasped but only striven after. He thought that what he had reached was only partial truth since Truth was greater than himself. Writing from South Africa to one Raojibhai Patel in India on March 21, 1914, he notes:

*What is the point in having high hopes of learning wisdom from me? We are all sailing in the same battered ship and I, with greater wisdom than the rest by way of experience, point out the direction in which you are welcome to toddling along. We are all in darkness, groping for the same thing. Maybe my steps are firmer and move with greater confidence.*⁷

Earlier, writing to the same person, he had noted: "If I have unceasing love, I should be a perfectly enlightened man, which, indeed I am not".⁸ Thus he tried to be humble in this search.

A. A search for Truth

M.K. Gandhi's search for God cannot but be located in his search for Truth. This has been with him not merely a notional knowledge but something that was born of experience, a felt-need and a constant habitual attitude of mind and heart. Writing later in life, between 1925 and 1929, his **Autobiography**, he points out to this, his attitude towards Truth and truthfulness. It was for him a habit, not without a rare lapse in early life but transformed by repentance and firm from then on.⁹ He remained truthful to the pledge he had given his mother before going to England. Later in South Africa, as he plunged into public service, he kept this commitment to Truth above every thing and thus even in his practice of law he made it a point never to swerve from truth and would not take up a case if the facts proved

⁶ **Autobiography**.

⁷ **CW XII** (1913-1914) no. 298, p. 393.

⁸ Letter, March 7, 1914, in **CW XII** (1913-1914) no. 289, p. 376.

⁹ Cf. **Autobiography**, part I.

the falsity of his client. In 1907, his brother in India had complained that he was not sending him money as he ought to, but M.K. Gandhi replied that he ought rather to be truthful to his conscience and as a public worker he should spend his money for public works. In that connection he wrote to his brother Lakshmidas Gandhi around April 20, 1907:

*I revere you as you are my elder brother. Our religion bids us treat our elders with veneration. I implicitly believe in that injunction. But I have greater regard for truth. This too is taught by our religion ... the change in my ideas is due to my pursuit of truth, I am quite helpless.*¹⁰

For him, it was a constant listening to the inner voice and being faithful to it. At the historic mass meeting of Indians at Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 1906, he spoke of the seriousness of the pledge they were taking and how necessary it was to understand its gravity and remain faithful to it, and hence the need to listen to the inner voice: "Everyone must only search his own heart, and if the inner voice assures him that he has the requisite strength to carry him through, then only should he pledge himself and then only could his pledge bear fruit".¹¹ Finally, when the short-lived compromise with Gen. Smuts had been made, he considered it a victory for truth and wrote in his paper, **Indian Opinion** on February 8, 1908:

*We consider this a victory for truth ... We do assert this was a fight on behalf of truth, and that most of the leaders fought with a scrupulous regard for truth. That is why there has been such a wonderful result. Truth is God, or God is nothing but Truth. We come across this idea in every religion. It is a divine law that he who serves that Truth—that God—will never suffer defeat.*¹²

And he goes on to say that even if at times such a person appears to fail, he cannot really fail, because he is fighting in the name of God and is serving Truth and doing his duty in the name of God. However, this firmness in seeking Truth in matters of justice cannot make us blind to our own faults and failings. He is very frank in his criticism of the community and acknowledges its faults and would not indulge in flattery and falsehood: "We have never cherished nor do we do so now, the idea of doing anything simply to please others".¹³

¹⁰ CW VI (1906-1907) no. 438, p. 433

¹¹ CW V (1905-1906) no. 441, p. 420-421.

¹² CW VIII (1908) no. 34, p. 61.

¹³ **Indian Opinion**, October 28, 1905, in CW V (1905-1906) no. 132, p. 114.

It was this sincere quest for Truth that made him consider carefully before his conscience, every question that rose. Thus during his sojourn in South Africa at an early stage, he had been in the habit of attending Christian religious services and engaged himself in many a religious discussion and read whatever Christian literature that came to his notice. The result of all this was that a number of questions rose in his honest mind. He did not keep quiet about them but wrote to a number of friends both in England and India. Of these, Raichandra¹⁴ and the twenty-seven questions that he posed in a letter to him, sometime before June 1894, deserve mention. Some of the questions were: God as the creator of the universe; the nature of the soul, *Mōkṣa*, transmigration; the authorship of the *Gītā*, *Vēda*, Bible, etc. The answers given by a patient Raichandra put an end to his troubles.¹⁵ He began to see a little more clearly that Hinduism is broad enough to accept a variety of truths and one need not leave the Hindu fold to follow certain personal convictions. If there are any errors in Hinduism, they are all misinterpretations and later additions which have to be removed. Of this we shall see later in stage II.

B. His concept of God at this stage

According to his own confession in his **Autobiography**, his religious beliefs were rather indifferent and consisted for the most part in external observances such as temple visiting or mechanical recitations of prayers or listening to pious readings.¹⁶ And his realization of God's reality was experiential. Recalling a special occasion when in England, during his studies, he had been saved from the wiles of a woman through the timely warning of a friend, Gandhi notes in his Gujarati newspaper, *Navajivan*, May 17, 1925: "For me, this was an occasion when I first became aware of the existence of God".¹⁷ He mentions too, other occasions when God rescued him and thus

¹⁴ Or Raychandbhai, as Gandhi called him in Gujarati. He was a merchant in gems and a Jain philosopher with a very keen mind. Gandhi had met him some time previously and had been very deeply impressed by his ability to concentrate on many things at the same time and yet keep a great calm and peace within.

¹⁵ Cf. CW I (1884-1896) no. 35, p. 127-128; see also CW XXXII (1926-1927), Appendix I, p. 593-602 which contains the reply of Raichandra.

¹⁶ Cf. *Autobiography*, part I, ch. X.

¹⁷ CW XXVII (1925) no. 59, p. 110.

manifested his presence in his life.¹⁸ And this led him to a trust in God who provides and he let his insurance policy lapse.¹⁹ But all these, one may object, are later reflections. What was his thinking at the time in question?

Commenting on the Paris Metro accident on August 10, 1903, when 84 were killed and many injured, he writes in his South African newspaper, **Indian Opinion**, dated August 20, 1903, that it was part of the divine visitation and a reminder that on this earth we are merely sojourners and that there is a future life.²⁰ Similar is his judgment, at this time, about the rains that failed in South Africa,²¹ and the earthquake in north India.²² On the other hand, the struggle of the Indian community in South Africa (during 1907) shows that God protects the righteous;²³ and those who believe in God and trust in Him will not be let down.²⁴

At the same time, he was quick to perceive any falsification of God. Injustice and God cannot go together. In the name of God injustices cannot be perpetrated or tolerated. One cannot allow oneself to be manipulated by the powers that be, on the plea of submission to God's will when all along it is only human machinations. This is borne out by his clear arguments against Mr. Hosken, a friend of the Indians, and who, on behalf of the Government, tried to dissuade the Indians from burning their newly acquired registration certificates by arguing that they must bow to the inevitable as the will of God. Gandhi reacted to this with an excellent argument which, though long, deserves to be quoted in full:

Let us then analyse the doctrine laid down, namely, that Indians as an Eastern people, should recognize and bow to the inevitable. By the term, Mr. Hosken meant to convey that the Act, having been demanded by the white people of the Transvaal, and unanimously sanctioned by the local parliament, was in the nature of an act of God. We are constrained to take exception to the proposition laid down by Mr. Hosken. The honourable

¹⁸ Cf. *Autobiography*, part II, ch. XXIII, p. 136; cf. also part III, ch. XXII, p. 206-208.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, part IV, ch. IV, p. 219.

²⁰ CW III (1898-1903) no. 324, p. 500.

²¹ CW IV (1903-1905) no. 3, p. 4.

²² CW IV (1903-1905) no. 365, p. 428.

²³ CW VII (1907) no. 14, p. 27.

²⁴ CW VII (1907) no. 66, p. 97.

gentleman admitted that he himself did not like the Act, and that he would himself, if he could, grant the Indian request. He also admitted that 'passive resistance' was a legitimate method of securing redress of a felt grievance. On his own showing, therefore, Mr. Hosken's contention that the Act is in the nature of an act of God falls to the ground. We, however, go further. No action of a human being is considered by the Eastern mind as a divine dispensation, unless it is *intrinsically justifiable*. And when an Eastern submits to the apparently inevitable, there is always traceable behind such submissions, not a recognition of the Divine hand, but of base selfishness. The spirit is then willing, but the flesh is weak ... We answer, in the words of his master, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and everything shall be added unto you". We believe that, in resisting the wretched Act, Indians would be seeking the 'Kingdom of God'.²⁵

Thus God is a God of justice and not of injustice. A wonderful argument which anticipates what modern liberation theology also proposes!

One of the groups of Indians under Mr. Hajee Cassim of Transvaal submitted a petition to the Government, surrendering to its demands. The words in the petition sounded abominable to Gandhi, and even down right blasphemous: "The language of the petition is abject and worthy of a slave. In using the words 'We are wax in the hands of the law', they have sinned against God, who alone holds sway over us. Why then should we use towards oppressive rulers language which is appropriate in regard to Him alone?"²⁶ For himself, Gandhi would boldly assert that he feared no one but God.²⁷

At times he was distressed by the gross misrepresentation of Hinduism by Christians. These misrepresentations created misunderstandings and a ridiculing of the Hindus. Hence, in a note given to the Resident Magistrate of Durban, Mr. James Stuart about 1904, he remarks:

*The missionaries have hastily interpreted the great Hindu belief in **Eternal Bliss** to mean **Nothingness**. They say "according to the Hindu belief, the greatest thing is to vanish into nothing —annihilation". This presentment has created a wide gulf between the Christian and the Hindu faiths to the detriment of both.*²⁸

²⁵ **Indian Opinion**, August 10, 1907, in **CW VII** (1907) no. 107, p. 151 (emphasis mine).

²⁶ **CW VII** (1907) no. 182, p. 226.

²⁷ **CW VIII** (1908) no. 30, p. 55.

²⁸ **CW IV** (1903-1905) no. 74, p. 94.

And he goes on to explain how, if Hindus describe God as unknowable or God as 'It', there is a special meaning in which it is to be understood:

This divine is the great 'unknowable' of Spencer, but it is only relative unknowable; that is to say, not capable of being known by means of the ordinary instruments of knowledge described by Spencer. If, however, you admit the existence of a higher instrument than mere common intellect, which as a matter of fact both the Hindus and Christians do, 'It' may not be unknowable.²⁹

In 1905, Gandhi gave a series of four lectures to the Theosophical Society of Johannesburg. He gives a good summary of these in his paper **Indian Opinion**, on April 15, 1905. In the part that deals with the tenets of Hinduism, he gives his own understanding of the Hindu creed, which makes an interesting reading since he has tried to use Western categories, thus showing how he himself quite often synthesized or adapted what he had learnt in the West:

God exists. He is without beginning, immaculate and without any attribute or form. He is omnipresent and omnipotent. His original form is Brahman. It neither does, nor causes to be done. It does not govern. It is bliss incarnate, and by it all this is sustained. The soul exists, and is distinct from the body. It is also without a beginning, without birth. Between its original form and the Brahman, there is no distinction. But it takes on from time to time a body as a result of Karma³⁰ or the power of Māyā,³¹ and goes on being born again and again into high or low species in accordance with the good or bad deeds performed by it. To be free from the cycle of birth and death and be merged in Brahman is Mokṣa or liberation ...³²

He concludes it by saying that though these are the tenets of the Hindu beliefs, there are a number of schools of thought. Regarding man, he would consistently speak of a duality in man: the *ātman*³³ and body, wherein the *ātman* is of same nature as Supreme *Ātman*³⁴: "God is the Supreme *Āt-*

²⁹ CW IV (1903-1905) no. 74, p. 95.

³⁰ Literally, it means the results of deeds or in an interpretative meaning, the result of unfulfilled desires; however, this is not the only interpretation.

³¹ Literally, it means 'power of illusion'.

³² CW IV (1903-1905) no. 34, p. 408.

³³ *Ātman* is a difficult word to translate. It has been translated by some as life principle. Christian circles in India have used this word in the various vernaculars to do the service for the concept of 'soul'. This would be only an approximation. Personally, I have been struck by its similarity with the German 'atmen' — 'Atem', and the Dutch 'ademen' — Adem. (Perhaps an ancient Indo-Germanic word).

³⁴ *Ātman* in capital letters often refers interpretatively to the Supreme Being.

man. The *ātman* exists. *Mōkṣa* is possible for it. The ideas of *pāpa* and *punya*³⁵ are true”³⁶. Writing on July 7, 1913 to Jamnadas Gandhi, a relative in India, he makes what appears to be a curious statement but not so curious if seen against the background of some of the schools of Indian philosophy and theology:

*God exists, and yet does not. He does not, in any literal sense. The ātman that has attained mōkṣa is god and therefore omniscient ... The ātmans about to attain mōkṣa are so many divine incarnations. We need not believe in their perfections while yet alive ...*³⁷

He would also unequivocally assert that God is one and the same God for all religions: “For there is only one Truth. And likewise, there is the same God over all”.³⁸ There is no need to quarrel over religions, since all are “different roads converging to the same point”.³⁹ From all these we can gather some idea of how he considered God to be. The question has been raised by many whether he believed in a personal God. We shall answer this question while considering Stage II. For the time being, it is sufficient to say that there are enough indications to claim a belief in his heart of hearts to a personal God at the early parts of the present stage. But when he begins to verbalize them, he presents them in Indian categories. The question raised is often from the vantage point of Western philosophical categories and the answers cannot be given adequately in Western categories to represent accurately the Eastern thought, though approximations may be attempted.

III. A genuine concern for others as an integral part of search for God

Gandhi, as we have noted in the earlier section,⁴⁰ was extremely shy. This extreme shyness had prevented him from speaking in public and as a lawyer, he could not get himself started. But it was only the circumstances he encountered in South Africa that made him come out of his shell.

³⁵ *Pāpa* means sin or result of sin, and *punya* means merits of good deeds.

³⁶ CW XI (1911-1913) no. 156, p. 156.

³⁷ CW XII (1913-1914) no. 69, p. 92-93.

³⁸ CW VII (1907) no. 245, p. 306.

³⁹ *Hind Swaraj*, ch. X, in CW X (1909-1911) no. 3, p. 29-30.

⁴⁰ Cf. above, p. 2.

Here truth was at stake and he had to speak out and so he did. His fellow men were ill treated and injustice was meted out to them and so he had to act. It was not so much that he was a man of prayer or a religious man first, that moved him to action, but rather, a concomitant realization of a needed action for the neighbour that moved him towards God in an explicit manner, what he was already doing implicitly. The implicit was his overriding commitment to Truth, which for him, as he progressed, became explicitated and objectivized as God. It was this Truth that moves one to be true in his life and such a person cannot but succeed. Hence, during the South African struggle, he makes this statement: "Our motto should be Truth and nothing but the Truth. With the aid of Truth we shall be able to cross even oceans of misery. No action undertaken with a sincere motive ever goes unrewarded".⁴¹ Thus it was a praxis oriented realization, i.e. he engages himself in action for the neighbour, which action at the same time leads him to the realization of God. Consequently, the action done for others is a religious act: "I consider any selfless work done in the service of the community as a religious and not a worldly act".⁴²

This action for the neighbour is not to be a divisive action. He pleads with the whites not to consider him as one who has come to divide the peoples but rather as one who has come to reconcile the two communities and remove misunderstanding.⁴³ When he found that Indian workers had been exploited by cruel railway contractors at Lobito Bay in Portuguese Africa and were returning poor and broken, he urges concrete action on their behalf by fellow Indians in Natal:

*... meet these people and hear their story ... If they do not have food to eat, a fund should be raised for feeding them. If they are without clothes, they should be given clothes to cover themselves with ... it is only through the blessings of the poor that they (Congress Workers) will prosper.*⁴⁴

⁴¹ Indian Opinion, July 13, 1912, in CW XI (1911-1913) no. 229, p. 274.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Cf. a letter to the editor of the Natal Mercury, in CW II (1896-1897) no. 46, p. 247.

⁴⁴ Indian Opinion, April 18, 1908, in CW VIII (1908) no. 98, p. 192-193.

A. The basis for this concern is human solidarity

If the praxis of concern for others led him to God, what was the basis of this concern? It is the oneness of all living creatures, whereby all are knit together. Writing in his South African paper, **Indian Opinion** on April 29, 1914 on the occasion of the second edition of his controversial book, **Hind Swarāj**, he presents an interesting imagery:

*I, for one, bear no ill will against the British or against any people or individuals. All living creatures are of the same substance as all drops of water in the ocean are of the same substance. I believe that all of us, individual souls, living in this ocean of spirit, are the same with one another with the closest bond among ourselves. A drop that separates soon dries up and any soul that believes itself separate from others is likewise destroyed.*⁴⁵

It then follows that if all of us are one, then evil deeds done by some, can affect others. Thus he would interpret the lack of rain in South Africa in 1903 as a result of the injustices done to the Indian community.⁴⁶ However, in a series of articles in the **Indian Opinion** about important personages, he cites Florence Nightingale, Sir Henry Lawrence and Horatio Nelson as being the reason why their nation prospered: "Those who have faith in God recognize that the British do not rule over India without His will. This too is a divine law that those who rule do so because of the good deeds they have done before".⁴⁷ On the contrary, the numerous people in central India, who faced starvation in 1908, did so because of the wrong deeds of fellow Indians in South Africa!

Some readers may wonder what the connection is between fraudulent practice in relation to permits in the Transvaal and trading licences in Natal on the one hand and famine on the other. That we do not perceive this connection is in itself an error ... It would be a great and true help indeed if, instead of sending money from here or being useful in some other way, we reformed ourselves and learnt to be truthful. If the Indians here observed truth in word and deed and behaved with courage, that cannot but have some effect in India. Pain in any part of the body is felt by the mind. The healthy condition of a part has a benign effect on the whole. Sim-

⁴⁵ CW XII (1913-1914) no. 315, p. 412 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁶ **Indian Opinion**, October 8, 1903, in CW IV (1903-1905) no. 3, p. 4.

⁴⁷ **Indian Opinion**, October 28, 1905, CW V (1905-1906) no. 135, p. 117-118; cf. also **Indian Opinion**, September 9, 1905, in CW V (1905-1906) no. 80, p. 62; also October 10, 1905, in CW V (1905-1906) no. 121, p. 103.

*ilarly, good or bad actions of individuals have a corresponding effect on the whole people. We believe this to be a divine law.*⁴⁸

Similarly, describing how the lepers are looked after by the white men while the Indians shunned any work for the lepers, he remarks poignantly: "It may well be that the British preside over an empire and prosper because of the blessings of these lepers while we live in misery because of their curses".⁴⁹ Commenting in 1910 on two who were suffering in prison during the South African struggle, he feels that their suffering will do good to others and this by divine dispensation:

*The sufferings of these two will help the prisoners who follow. Such is the mysterious law of God. We must learn to submit to that law. Any man who puts himself to suffering will diminish the value of that suffering if he himself enjoys its fruits. For his self-sacrifice to be perfect, he must go on suffering as long as his breath holds out and he must leave the fruits of his suffering to be enjoyed by those who come after.*⁵⁰

Finally, he felt that whatever be the differences, the peoples of the world are one. Reporting in the **Indian Opinion** on July 15, 1914 about a speech he gave towards the end of his stay in South Africa, he notes: "I do not hold for one moment that East and West cannot combine. I think the day is coming when East must meet West, or West meet East, but I think that the social evolution of the West today lies in one channel, and that of the Indian in another".⁵¹

B. The basis for this concern is human dignity

If there was anything for which M.K. Gandhi fought resolutely, it was for the upholding of the human dignity. If he protested, it was against the denial of this human dignity. This can be seen from the very early days of his public career. There are scores of letters, pamphlets, and other materials to bear witness to this statement regarding the early days. In a petition submitted on December 27, 1902 to Joseph Chamberlain, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies who visited Durban, he writes: "When years ago we protested against disenfranchisement, we did so because of the degradation

⁴⁸ **Indian Opinion**, March 28, 1908, in **CW VIII** (1908) no. 74, p. 157-158.

⁴⁹ **Indian Opinion**, April 11, 1908, in **CW VIII** (1908) no. 88, p. 180.

⁵⁰ **Indian Opinion**, March 26, 1910, in **CW X** (1909-1911) no. 130, p. 197.

⁵¹ **CW X II** (1913-1914) no. 350, p. 447.

it involved".⁵² He protests very vigorously indeed and with telling argument against the degradation and injustice involved in the new anti-Indian moves by the South African Government. He makes clear that what he is asking for is not charity or kindness but justice, which for Gandhi, is always connected with Truth, above all. Thus commenting in his paper **Indian Opinion** on July 9, 1903 about an item that appeared in another paper, **The Natal Advertiser**, he writes:

*It bases segregation on "salus populi suprema lex". We do not read "Europeani" before "populi". We, therefore, think that since the Indian is, after all, a human being, he is included in the term "populi". If so, what is the supreme law for the safety of the people in general? Surely not to degrade a portion of them, and push them into ghettos or pens, as if they were so many sheep or cattle ... nor do we want them [the British] to practise altruism in our favour. But we do request them not to use the supremacy in order to do us injustice, to degrade and insult us.*⁵³

He suggests to the whites that if it were the habits of the Indians that were offensive, these could be fraternally corrected or changed. A certain amount of leeway can be given for an inevitable social distinction but on no account should this lead one to a degradation of their status.⁵⁴ His vigilance quickly detected such a degradation involved even in some very small matters, which perhaps, others would have passed by in silence but he would not, and protested fearlessly. Thus when coronation commemoration medals were struck, they were distributed only to the white children but not to the others. So he asks:

*The exclusion is certainly not based on grounds of economy, for the Indian children are, I think, about 3,000 against 20,000 European children. Evidently, the coronation celebration day is to be marked out for the Indian children to realize as vividly as possible that the possession of a brown skin is a sure mark of humiliation and degradation in the estimation of the Government of the colony.*⁵⁵

Much earlier, writing to the editor of **The Times of Natal** on October 25, 1894 and reacting against an article that ridiculed the Indians and advocated their disenfranchisement, he writes:

⁵² CW III (1898-1903) no. 217, p. 321.

⁵³ CW III (1898-1903) no. 285, p. 438.

⁵⁴ CW II (1896-1897) no. 46, p. 250.

⁵⁵ CW III (1898-1903) no. 199, p. 296-297.

*... is it un-Christian, un-English to be consistent. "Suffer little children to come to me", said the Master. His disciples in the colony would improve upon the saying by inserting "White" after "little" ... If He came among us, will He not say to many of us, "I know you not"? Sir, may I venture to offer you a suggestion? Will you re-read your New Testament? Will you ponder over your attitude towards the coloured population of the colony? Will you then say you can reconcile it with the Bible teaching or the best British traditions? If you have washed your hands clean of both Christ and British traditions, I can have nothing to say. I gladly withdraw what I have written.*⁵⁶

During the course of anti-Indian legislations the Government brought a law that the indentured labourer cannot complain against his master and that if he did, he would be considered as one trying to break the contract and be punished accordingly. There had been a case of an indentured labourer who was cruelly belaboured by his master and had come to Gandhi bleeding from broken teeth and multiple wounds. Gandhi had pleaded his case successfully on that occasion and had him transferred to another planter. So he requested that this clause, which was demeaning and tended to reduce the indentured labourer to slavery, be removed: "... take out the clause complained of or so alter it as not to deprive the indentured Indian practically of his right of complaint".⁵⁷

What he demanded was that the Indians, as British subjects, be treated on an equal footing with the white colonists. He was not asking for any special privileges but what was their right.⁵⁸ If we ask further, whether such an equality could be claimed at an even deeper level, he would perhaps have said that it is because our *ātman*s are all equal. In another context, writing about spiritual life and the endeavour one must make to become perfect, he writes to Maganlal on July 17, 1911: "If you consider my *ātman* to have great power, yours too, has it. There is no difference between us in respect of our *ātman*s ... we are equals".⁵⁹

Another value that he always cherished and which is a natural consequence of considering the dignity of a human being is freedom. He would not compel anybody. His whole objection to the Asiatic Registration Act was

⁵⁶ CW I (1884-1896) no. 50, p. 167.

⁵⁷ CW III (1898-1903) no. 36, p. 85.

⁵⁸ CW VIII (1908) no. 284, p. 475.

⁵⁹ CW XI (1911-1913) no. 105, p. 128-129.

that it was discriminatory and forced upon the community. And when the community had decided to boycott this procedure, and had taken an oath that it would do so, he stood by it. But there were some who, out of fear for the consequences, wanted to register themselves. The others resented it but Gandhi would have none of it, and would not employ any force to restrain those who wanted to register themselves. He told the volunteers that they should place before the prospective recalcitrants the evil of what they were doing and stop at that. This is again an act in respecting their dignity as human beings.⁶⁰

IV. Means for prosecuting this search for God — Truth

In his interesting article, "Gandhi's God — a Substitute for the British Empire", Jim Wilson notes that the number of references to God progressively increases from volumes 1 to 8 of **The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi**:⁶¹

*Five in volume 1; only one in volume 2; seven in volume 3; 18 in volume 4; 20 in volume 5; 11 in volume 6; then quite abruptly, a large increase—about 90 references— in volume 7, more than in the preceding six together; and about 120 in volume 8.*⁶²

Wilson interprets this to mean that originally Gandhi had faith in the justice and fairplay of the British and their fair constitution, the rectitude of their highest courts. Consequently, he was pinning his faith on this at the beginning and even in the middle of his monumental struggle against the injustices done to the people of Indian origin in South Africa. But from 1906-1907 (which corresponds to volume 7 of the **Collected Works**) his faith in the justice and fairplay of the British was rudely shaken and he ends up with shifting this confidence and faith to God who is Truth and who would never fail. His ways may be different but Truth, i.e. God, will always triumph.⁶³ This is indeed an interesting observation and put rather bluntly. I would

⁶⁰ **Indian Opinion**, September 28, 1907, in **CW VII** (1907) no. 202, p. 256.

⁶¹ These are the volumes I am using in this dissertation and abbreviated **CW**.

⁶² WILSON, J., "Gandhi's God — a Substitute for the British Empire", in **Religion** 16 (1986) 343-357, p. 343.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

rather look at it this way: for Gandhi, all lawful authority, to be lawful must be truthful and for a time the British appeared to be so but later they show their weakness and he sees them as oppressors, bad rulers and not representing Truth —God. Again, if references to God are less in the earlier writings, it is not because he lacked faith or trust in God, but rather it was implicit. One need not wear it on one's sleeves. Occasions do come and what is implicit becomes explicit and verbalized. In his struggle in South Africa, he did realize that if there was one thing that could unite Hindus, Muslims, Parsees, and Christians among the peoples of Indian origin in South Africa, it was their deep religiosity. Also we observed earlier at the beginning of this article and in the previous that for Gandhi, many of his ideas were derived from praxis. So there is no wonder, if from praxis he turns more and more to God; but to say that God was a substitute for the British Empire is rather too much.

A. Life of prayer a means in this search for God

We notice that his own prayer life undergoes a steady change. This is but natural and normal. Early in life, it was only mechanical prayers, as he himself mentions in his **Autobiography**. Later, it involved trying to pray in community. He did attend many church services while in England and during his first two sojourns in South Africa. The real turning point to a deeper prayer life came during the long marches as stretcher bearer in connection with the Zulu Rebellion of 1906 and the subsequent vow of chastity. From now on, prayer would form an important part of his life and as a means of reaching out to God and his fellowmen. Of the need for the vow of chastity at this stage, he felt that as a public worker, it would be one way in which he could be more devoted to others.

Later, when he started his little community at Phoenix and still later at the Tolstoy farm, prayer along with work formed an important part but work had the greater part. When the Phoenix community shifted along with Gandhi and returned to India, they stayed with the poet Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan, Bengal. There, the leader of the Phoenix group, Maganlal was distressed by the little emphasis given there to manual labour that Gandhi had insisted on in South Africa. So he wrote to Gandhi in England, who replied on December 21, 1914:

You are right in concluding that agriculture is the only real prayer and service. It is not only fitting but it is actually one's duty to keep repeating

God's name, whether we are busy in the fields or having our meal, whether playing or wandering aimlessly, during a bath or at any other hour ... All the same, it is necessary to have some kind of a rule for the young. And so the time not meant for work in the fields should be specially appointed for prayers, that is, just before day break when it is still dark. The śāstras lay down that sandhya⁶⁴ etc. should be performed before dawn. The evening hour that we have set apart is the right one.⁶⁵

His interest in combining prayer and work originates from a visit he paid to a Trappist monastery near Durban in 1895. There he observed how the monks prayed and at the same time worked silently at their farm. It was a lasting impression. Writing about it in an article to **The Vegetarian** (a magazine in England), he makes this statement, obviously referring to all the anti-Catholic sentiments he had heard expressed while in England:

No matter whether one is a Protestant, a Christian or a Buddhist or what not, one cannot help exclaiming, after a visit to the farm: 'If this is Roman Catholicism, everything said against it is a lie'. It proves conclusively, to my mind, that a religion appears divine or devilish, according as its professors choose to make it appear.⁶⁶

It was this impression that made him try to combine prayer and work in all the āśrams he founded in South Africa and India.

B. Life of simplicity and dedication as means in this search for God

What he saw and felt all round him, the situation of injustice done to his countrymen, transformed him from being a shy reticent man into one who is dynamically involved in the struggle for truth and justice. It was Truth for which he stood, the Truth which he was to process later as being identical with God. Thus, in his **Autobiography** written between 1925-1929, he mentions how in this early stage in South Africa he found himself engaged in the service of the community and it was for him a potent means for realization of self and God in his life: "If I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for self-realization. I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God

⁶⁴ Prescribed set of Vēdic prayers.

⁶⁵ CW XII (1913-1914) no. 418, p. 559-560.

⁶⁶ **The Vegetarian**, May 18, 1895, in CW I (1884-1896) no. 64, p. 227-228.

could be realized only through service".⁶⁷ He also mentions some of these services at the early part of his public service in South Africa, a time during which he was a busy, successful lawyer and at the same time, the unpaid secretary of the Natal Indian Congress. Though he was busy, he spent two hours every day at a dispensary of free medicines as an unpaid compounder and interpreter for the poor patients. He also mentions an incident that opened his mind for this kind of concrete service. A poor leper had come to his doors for alms. He gave him not only food but also offered him shelter, dressed his wounds and looked after him for a while.⁶⁸ All these led him to a simplification of his life-style, serving his fellowmen without seeking any monetary reward or return. Gandhi also mentions in his **Autobiography** how he had received costly gifts of gold ornaments and other jewels on the eve of his departure to India at the end of his sojourn in South Africa in 1901. He felt that he could not take them for himself, for then, what he had done so far would not be service. Remuneration for public service, he felt, was the service itself. With great difficulty he persuaded his wife to part with the gifts she had received and placed the whole amount in a trust for the community's welfare.⁶⁹ On his return to India, he made a memorable train journey from Calcutta to Rajkot in a third class compartment so that he may experience the hardships of the poor.⁷⁰ This conviction that he must be poor and be spent for the poor, only grew further and in spite of remonstrances from his elder brother Laksmidas Gandhi, he persisted in it.⁷¹ He wished only to go further in such a life of poverty. One Dr. Mehta was his benefactor and helped him regularly in South Africa, towards the running of the Phoenix establishment. Writing to his cousins Chaganlal and Maganlal Gandhi who were at the Phoenix establishment, he writes on August 23, 1911:

I also wish, we in Phoenix adopt a life of total poverty while I am yet alive. I pray to God for such a time, but the portents, I find, are all to the contrary. It is unlikely that the time will ever come when we shall be living in real poverty. Dr. Meththa's help stands in the way. As long as this fount flows

⁶⁷ Cf. **Autobiography**, part II, ch. XXII, p. 132.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, part III, ch. VI, p. 169.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, part III, ch. XII, p. 183-185.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, part III, ch. XX, p. 199-200.

⁷¹ **CW VI** (1906-1907) no. 438, p. 433.

*on, I feel we shall not enjoy the rare privilege of knowing that we have not a pie left for the next day and wondering what will happen.*⁷²

Of course, this was not love of poverty for its own sake but as a means of spiritual progress, of being one with the poor and an ever growing trust in God.

His peculiar anthropology and view of man's life, but which was in line with main Indian thinking, made him engage in severe restrictions on food. Body, according to this view, is only a transitory abode of the *ātman*. It even prevents the *ātman* from self-realization. Therefore, it has to be controlled and checked. This is how he would project his ideas in India. But in South Africa, he seems to use slightly different categories because he was writing for Hindus, Muslims, Parsees, and Christians. Yet, the connotations are more or less the same. Thus in 1913 he writes:

*All religions have looked upon this body as a place where one may meet and recognize God. It is called the House of the Lord. It has been leased to us, all the rent we have to pay being praises of the Master. Another condition in the rent note is that we must not misuse it ...*⁷³

Similarly, his attitude to food made him look at it as a necessary evil. He would constantly try various levels of moderation, dietic experiments which bordered on being cranky. He considered wastage of food or over-eating as a form of stealing food from the poor because when one tries to get hold of something more than his share, he deprives someone else who has to have his equal share.⁷⁴ Thus, in South Africa he began a life-style and an experiment which was to take on a still greater significance and depth in India but the line seems to be essentially the same.

V. The concept of *satyāgraha* and *ahimsā* at this stage

Both *satyāgraha* and *ahimsā* are two important concepts evolved by Gandhi and they are recognized as such by most of the writers on Gandhi.

⁷² CW XI (1911-1913) no. 124, p. 150.

⁷³ Indian Opinion, August 8, 1913, in CW XII (1913-1914) no. 112, p. 165-166.

⁷⁴ Indian Opinion, on March 1, 1913, in CW XI (1911-1913) no. 351, p. 473-475.

However, these two terms are inadequately understood.⁷⁵ Gandhi himself never defined them systematically because for him, these concepts cannot really be adequately defined. He felt that they were in a constant state of evolution. He was discovering more about them in his 'experimentations', as he was fond of saying. Concrete situations manifested newer depths of meaning to him. And yet, this is not to say that we cannot take the various strands and piece them together to form an integral picture. In this section we shall restrict ourselves only to the level at which they stood during this first stage.

At the end of his first stay in South Africa, he returned to India in 1896, but was commissioned to represent the problems of Indians in South Africa and to make the public of India aware of the situation. Accordingly he wrote a pamphlet, dated August 14, 1896 which ran into more than one edition and was avidly read by many in India. He notes therein the method they were going to follow in the struggle: "One method in South Africa is to conquer this hatred by love. At any rate, that is our goal. We should often fall short of that ideal but we can adduce innumerable instances to show that we have acted in that spirit".⁷⁶ He would exhort his own countrymen in South Africa to avoid all divisions and quarrels based on narrow regionalisms brought from India. He would want them to be able to forgive and he appeals to their noble sentiments and religious traditions:

*We, as a people, are devoted to religious speculations, and to doctrines of non-resistance and of returning good for evil ... There is hardly any virtue in the ability to do a good turn to those that have done similarly by us. That even the criminals do. But it would be some credit if a good turn could be done to an opponent. If this very simple thing be always borne in mind, we do think that success will come to us far more quickly than we are likely to imagine.*⁷⁷

As a stickler for facts, Gandhi paid attention to studying the situation as accurately as possible, marshalling all details and then examining the justice or injustice of the case. Thus he presents the injustice done to India as a British possession. He asserts that the British policy in India has

⁷⁵ Cf. THEKKINEDATH, J., *Love of Neighbour in Mahatma Gandhi*, Alwaye (India), 1973, p. 67.

⁷⁶ CW II (1896-1897) no. 2, p. 29.

⁷⁷ *Indian Opinion*, August 20, 1903, in CW III (1898-1903) no. 322, p. 498-499.

impoverished the nation steadily. In a telling article which appeared in **Indian Opinion** on April 4, 1907, he says:

*So long as the officials can persuade [the British people] that we shall put up with any amount of suffering, they will believe in the colonies and the burden of the Indian people will increase. This is the way of the world. The rich grow richer, the poor poorer. The burden on those who carry it increases and those who do not carry any go unscathed. The moral is that we in the colony will not stand any more burden ...*⁷⁸

He goes on to describe, with facts and figures, this statement. India's revenues then totalled £44 million. Out of this, half (£22 million) was spent on the military department to pay the salary of British soldiers and buy military wares from England; a further £15 million went straight to England; and so only a paltry £7 million remained in the country. If this were to continue, the country would see further ruin. So he says that keeping quiet will not do nor just speaking about it: "Speaking does not mean mere shouting. It must be accompanied by kicking. The way we can kick in South Africa or in India is to go to gaol. If we do not help in oppression that is being perpetrated on us, we shall be free".⁷⁹ Consequently, we can understand from this how Gandhi develops his idea that it is because we cooperate with oppression and injustice, they continue. It would cease when we start non-cooperating with evil and oppose it, not with violence but with non-violence. The justice of the cause, the truth of it, i.e. the *satya* inherent in it will triumph.

In the beginning he employed the term passive resistance. But this term did not please him because of its connotations. About this time, the Women Suffragettes' Movement in England employed this term and Gandhi considered its methods to be violent and filled with hatred. Also it appeared to be a weapon of the weak and the very word 'passive' was a misnomer, since for him, the movement he led was active and positive. Hence he was searching for an appropriate and if possible an Indian term. Accordingly, he offered a prize through his paper, the **Indian Opinion**, for anyone who would suggest it. Various suggestions came and the nearest one was *sadā-graha*⁸⁰ suggested by his cousin Maganlal Gandhi of the Phoenix settlement. He changed it to *satyāgraha* and he himself explains the word thus

⁷⁸ CW VI (1906-1907) no. 441, p. 436.

⁷⁹ CW VI (1906-1907) no. 441, p. 437.

⁸⁰ Literally it means 'enduring or permanent firmness in resistance'.

on this occasion: "I think *satyāgraha* is better than *sadāgraha*. 'Resistance' means determined opposition to anything. The correspondent has rendered it as *āgraha* (firmness, insistence). *Āgraha* in a right cause is *sat*⁸¹ or *satya* (truth) *āgraha* ... the phrase does not exhaust the connotation ..." ⁸² So Gandhi was not fully satisfied even with his own terminology at this stage. As time went on he kept purifying it and describing it further in the light of events. At this stage, he continued using the older term 'passive resistance' along with the new one of *satyāgraha*. He also distinguishes between two forces —body-force and soul-force. Of these two, the body-force was violence while the soul-force was non-violence and *satyāgraha*. This soul-force can be used even by one who is weak in body:

*Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force ... If by using violence I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self.*⁸³

Answering a question of Rev. J. Doke (in whose house he had spent some days recovering from the wounds suffered in an attack by a compatriot),⁸⁴ he clarifies what he had meant by passive resistance: "Passive resistance, in my opinion, means self-imposed suffering of an acute type, intended to prove the justice of the cause, and thus to bring conviction home to the minds of the colonists".⁸⁵

It was not easy for him to train the Indians in South Africa according to the ideals of non-violence. When he had tried to register himself voluntarily, following the oral agreement with Gen. Smuts, a Pathan (belonging to the Indian community) had assaulted him severely and his reaction to it was one of patience and acceptance of the fact that one has to accept the suffering involved: "... as in the way of the world, people will persist in the

⁸¹ *Sat* is a philosophico-religious Indian term to denote reality —basic and fundamental.

⁸² *Indian Opinion*, January 11, 1908, in *CW VIII* (1908) no. 11, p. 23. The explanations in brackets are mine.

⁸³ GANDHI, M.K., *Hind Swaraj* (written in 1908), ch. XVII, in *CW X* (1909-1911) no. 3, p. 48.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

⁸⁵ *Indian Opinion*, July 25, 1908, in *CW VIII* (1908) no. 165, p. 400.

methods of violence ... the duty of the wise man is only to bear the suffering in patience".⁸⁶ Similarly, commenting on the attack perpetrated against Mr Essop Mia, the chairman of the Indian Association, he says that a *satyāgrahi* (one who follows *satyāgraha*) must have the courage to suffer and lose everything: violence to one's own person, money, reputation, etc. There is only one thing he cannot let go and that is Truth (*Satya*).⁸⁷

Satyāgraha for Gandhi meant not hurting of the one against whom it is used. It is rather a weapon to melt the other person and make him realize the wrong he is doing. The suffering of the innocent person, Gandhi believed, cannot go without effect. It is a force of truth and it cannot but win. When the Gandhi-Smuts agreement was in the offing, he compared the white men's violent railway strike that was in progress at about this time in South Africa and which was violently put down by the Government, with the *satyāgraha* the Indians had practised:

If we went on strike, it was not in order to harass the Government. We only wanted to suffer —do tapasçārya⁸⁸—by going to the gaol. In the event, we find that our victory is at hand ... Satyāgraha is not a game in which one might either win or lose. There is no room for failure in it. Brute force has to take its chance of success or failure. And the odds are always with the stronger party, irrespective of the rights of the case.⁸⁹

But five months earlier, when the negotiations had broken down, he had consoled his readers by saying that there must be some divine purpose in the delay. Some more suffering would be needed, a little more dying so that they could rise. He would encourage them to persevere in their *satyagraha*:

There is no life except through death. Death alone can raise us. It is the only effective means of persuasion. It is a seal which leaves a permanent imprint ... the only effective way of bringing about a change in this attitude is satyāgraha. It is a divine law that even the most hard-hearted man will melt if he sees his enemy suffering in innocence. The satyāgrahi volunteers are to suffer in this way.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Indian Opinion*, February 22, 1908, no. 46, p. 94.

⁸⁷ *Indian Opinion*, May 5, 1908, no. 139, p. 252.

⁸⁸ An exercise of austerity or penance in order to obtain a boon.

⁸⁹ *Indian Opinion*, February 4, 1914, in CW XII (1913-1914) no. 259, p. 341-342.

⁹⁰ *Indian Opinion*, September 13, 1913, in CW XII (1913-1914) no. 128, p. 187.

At the end of his stay in South Africa, he felt jubilant and writing in the Golden number of his paper, the **Indian Opinion**, he recommends that even children must be taught *satyāgraha* and trained in it from early age, even before learning the alphabet since *satyāgraha* is nothing but soul-power and even a child should know a little about what the soul is, what truth is and what love is. The child should learn that hate must be conquered by love, untruth by truth and violence by self-suffering.⁹¹ However, Gandhi was honest enough to observe that Indians in South Africa had joined in the movement with mixed motives. Not all were non-violent. They had to be constantly watched over and prevented from turning violent. Thus not all were convinced *satyāgrahis*. He said that the struggle in South Africa had dragged on so long because of this. He also acknowledged that to be a real *satyāgrahi*, one has to be a perfect man and that cannot be effected in a single day. It is a long drawn out process and needs training.⁹² For him, to embrace *satyāgraha* amounted to taking a great vow and one has to be ready to die rather than forsake it. In fact, he felt the ideal would be to take other simpler vows and after succeeding in keeping them, to proceed to the greater vow which is *satyāgraha*.⁹³

For him, *satyāgraha* will not take advantage of any weakness of the person against whom it is offered. Accordingly, he had voluntarily suspended *satyāgraha* during the railways' strike. Besides, when at the end of the struggle a commission sat to enquire, Gandhi refused to cooperate because of the composition of its members. In answer to an European who had suggested that the Indians should cash in on the opportunity offered, so that they could get many more privileges, Gandhi refused saying that one of the first principles of *satyāgraha* is not to enhance the original demands and second is that what has been achieved by *satyāgraha* can be sustained only by *satyāgraha*.⁹⁴

⁹¹ **Indian Opinion**, Golden Number, December 1, 1914, in CW XII (1913-1914) no. 359, p. 460-462.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ **Indian Opinion**, October 8, 1913, in CW XII (1913-1914) no. 161, p. 238.

⁹⁴ **Indian Opinion**, February 2, 1914, in CW XII (1913-1914) no. 265, p. 351.

Now it remains for us to make a brief survey of the notion of *ahimsā* at this stage. This concept's development could be better perceived in the second stage. Here, let it be mentioned in the simplest and most preliminary manner. At the first sight it appears to be a negative terminology but one need not be surprised at this since many an Indian concept has such a negative note. The word *himsā* means 'violence' or more literally, 'hurting', thus the opposite is *ahimsā* or 'non-violence' or more literally 'non-hurting'. This negative way of presenting is in line with the Indian concept of reality. For the Indian, reality is mysterious, beyond definition and is perceived more by inter-subjectivity than by a cold object-perception as in some types of Western thought. The closest approximation is the classical negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius. With these preliminaries, we can say that *ahimsā* is beyond definition and as such Gandhi was able to describe it in so many ways as he progressed in his 'experiments'. However, the notion is not unique nor original to Gandhi. It is an ancient Indian terminology, but perhaps the meaning Gandhi invested it with, was new and in a way deeper. At this stage, it was only the traditional forbearance, tolerance and respect for life that seems to occupy his thoughts. It is traditional in the sense that it was something that had been in vogue in the particular region of India from which he came. It was part of the Jain⁹⁵ tradition prevalent there. Yet, one cannot deny the other influences that shaped and fitted him to a life of service, to mention once again —the New Testament and Tolstoy (Gandhi would include here the *Gītā* as well). At this stage, we find in him a well developed sense of forbearance and forgiveness. Thus he would tell the Indian community not to be angry with those who had betrayed the community by registering their names against the common resolution: "Anger, malice, annoyance, selfishness, violence —all these are not only useless in our fight— they are positively harmful".⁹⁶

He would forgive and also give a charitable interpretation regarding the motives of others. Thus, writing in **Indian Opinion** on August 26, 1905, he had written angrily about the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon for what he had remarked during a convocation in India, namely, that the highest ideal of truth is, to a large extent, a Western concept. Gandhi, after giving a long

⁹⁵ Jain religion was founded by Mahavira, a contemporary of Buddha. It believes in pan-psychism.

⁹⁶ **Indian Opinion**, August 10, 1907 in CW VII (1907) no. 114, p. 155.

list of facts and references to prove his point, had demanded that the Viceroy apologize or withdraw his statements.⁹⁷ The Viceroy did not oblige and yet when he was withdrawn from India, Gandhi made very charitable remarks about him, which is what we may call *ahimsā* in action:

*It would appear to be an answer to the prayers of the suffering millions who were groaning under the autocratic rule. We think that in all he did, Lord Curzon was actuated by good intentions. He undoubtedly believed that he was doing good to the people of India in spite of themselves, in forcing down their throats what he was pleased to term reforms.*⁹⁸

Similarly, during his last imprisonment in South Africa, he manufactured a pair of sandals with his own hands for General Smuts (who had done harm to him by betraying the trust and had duped him during the first negotiation in 1908). General Smuts accepted the gift and appreciated the fact even many years later.⁹⁹ Thus *ahimsā* for Gandhi meant, even at this stage, not only physical non-violence but also an eschewing of all hatred even from one's mind. It would be verbalized much more in the next stage, in India.

VI. Dialectical tension between love of God and love for man at this stage?

As we have observed earlier, his religious feelings and convictions were just ordinary, bordering on the indifferent at the beginning but they grew in the course of time and according to various situations. If love for God were to be only feeling, then certainly he did not have it. Nor did he have any extraordinary experiences. But if love for God means a steady and firm attachment of the will, then certainly he had a great love for God even at this stage. It manifested itself as a firm attachment to Truth. For him, even at this stage, Truth was supreme. His seeking was for Truth and he always felt that what he was able to reach was only relative truth and hence the quest for the fullness of Truth.

At the same time, his love for fellowmen was also rooted in the same search for Truth. After all, the *ātman* he had, he felt, was the same *ātman* that other individuals around him had. They were all parts of the Supreme

⁹⁷ CW IV (1903-1905) no. 331, p. 392-394.

⁹⁸ Indian Opinion, August 26, 1905, in CW V (1905-1906) no. 67, p. 47.

⁹⁹ THEKKINEDATH, J., Love of Neighbour in Mahama Gandhi, p. 93.

Ātman. The bodies are various temporary abodes of the *ātman* which alone is true. However, situations of injustice existed in the world. These injustices are untruths, they are degrading human beings. His attachment to Truth cannot tolerate this untruth. Nor can he keep quiet about them. If he loved Truth, he has to help in the process of moving from untruth to Truth.

The question can then be raised whether he moved from the love of God to love of fellowmen or vice versa. It would appear that he moved much more from the love of fellowmen to the love for God. It was the concrete situation of injustice and untruth that seems to move him to action and transform this shy, timid person into one who is dynamic, ready for any sacrifice. We should, however, pause and reflect further to realize that the situations were rather occasions than the causes. Perhaps, it is more correct to say that he possessed an unconscious love and commitment to Truth which becomes explicitated and verbalized on the occasion of meeting with the injustices and consequent untruths. His love for Truth would then be the moving force to recognize untruths when he meets them and try to transform them. This, he would consider, as his *dharma*¹⁰⁰ or the duty of working for righteousness, setting everything in right order or *dharma*. It could very well be said that the objective situations he met with, objectivized and concretized in ever deeper way his perception of Truth and strengthened further his attachment to Truth. The dialectics involved in this process is not one of conflict and opposition but a harmonious growth of appropriating the best elements into a unified whole. Evidently, therefore, one cannot try to see perfection at this first stage but the beginnings can be perceived and inferred.

His demand for action and not passivity is obviously from his study and interpretation of the *Gītā*.¹⁰¹ Writing in the **Indian Opinion** on January 28, 1904, he urges his fellow countrymen to action: "We must do our

¹⁰⁰ *Dharma* is a complex but important Indian concept. It has many different connotations such as the right order in the material universe, society, self, etc.; it could also mean righteousness, duty, law and order, etc. or even charity.

¹⁰¹ *Gītā*, or *Bhagavadgītā* is part of the story of *Mahābhārata* where Pāṇḍavās, the five brothers were arrayed in the great battle at Kurukṣetra against the Kauravas, their opposing 100 cousins. Kṛṣṇa acted as the charioteer of Arjuna, a hero of the Pāṇḍavās, but Arjunā hesitated to act since he felt it to be *adharma* (not righteous) to kill his cousins and teachers. Kṛṣṇa advocates action and this is portrayed in the inclusion (perhaps a later addition) of *Gītā*, the conversation between Arjunā and Kṛṣṇa. *Gītā* remains the epitome of practical philosophy, ethics, devotion, etc. for many an Indian.

duty; the will of God will then come to pass ... To make all possible effort is our duty; the result is in God's hands".¹⁰² He mentions here the popular story of a man whose wheel got stuck in the mud but all his prayers could not extricate it. However, when he put his hand to the work, God helped him.¹⁰³ In 1907, when the struggle had entered an important stage, the question arose as to what would happen to the families of all those who went to prison. He said that since they have faith and trust in God, they need not worry but at the same time they would have to do what they could by going door to door, conscientizing the people and gathering what funds they could, in preparation for the struggle.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, writing in 1910, he notes: "Telling beads on the rosary will be no answer to the Government's attack on your manliness and its attempts to enslave you. The servant of God will never consent to be the slave of any man".¹⁰⁵ Thus love for God, trust in God, should never be an excuse for inaction, falsely construing a religion of passivity and letting *adharma*¹⁰⁶ increase and multiply. A love for God should mean cooperating with God in setting aright the wrongs in the world or to put it in Gandhian terms: a commitment to Truth means to remove untruths of every kind. Gandhi was conscious that this is a long slow process but effort has to be made towards its achievement if we are committed to Truth-God: "Deeds after all are better than words".¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² *Indian Opinion* on January 28, 1904, in CW IV (1903-1905) no. 93, p. 121-122.

¹⁰³ *Indian Opinion* on January 28, 1904, in CW IV (1903-1905) no. 93, p. 121-122.

¹⁰⁴ CW VII (1907) no. 167, p. 208.

¹⁰⁵ *Indian Opinion*, February 5, 1910, in CW VIII (1909-1911) no. 76, p. 149.

¹⁰⁶ *Adharma* is the opposite of *dharma*. Broadly translated, it could mean unrighteousness, injustice, disturbance of the right order, etc.

¹⁰⁷ *Indian Opinion*, November 11, 1906, in CW VI (1906-1907) no. 28, p. 30.

Chapter II

The second stage: From silence to silence 1915-1926

This second stage stretches from the time of his definitive return to India in 1915 right up to the end of the year 1926, the year of his voluntary, temporary retirement from active politics and observance of political silence during that memorable year.

I. The historical background and biographical notes

He returned to India from South Africa via England, early in 1915, as we have noted at the beginning of the previous chapter. Gokhale, the then leading politician of the moderate group had advocated that he spend a year of silent observation of the situation in India. He spent the year in travelling in class III compartments. What he saw moved him profoundly. He saw the dirt, squalor, ignorance and poverty of the masses. He studied also the political atmosphere. On the one hand, extremists were active revolutionaries who advocated violence as a means to achieving India's freedom. On the other hand, some like Sri Aurobindo Ghosh of Bengal had withdrawn from revolutionary political activity and taken to *saṁnyāsa* or the life of a renunciant; others like Vaman Tilak in Maharashtra wished to fight the Government vigorously with whatever means available and still others like Annie Besant (a British theosophist who made India her home and asked for home rule by Indians), Gokhale tried to chalk out divergent moderate paths.

Even before this year of silence was over, his political mentor Gokhale died and his political mantle fell on Gandhi but it was not immediate or automatic. It took four more years for him to emerge as a socio-politico-religious leader of national importance with a big following. It may be surprising that we use such a combination as 'socio-politico-religious' but that is not an impossible combination, nor unusual. Amaury de Riencourt makes a valid observation that whereas after the Renaissance the Westerners had tended to compartmentalize science, philosophy, religions, ethics, literature, etc. and as a result suffer from lop-sided views, the East notably China and India have gone through such a phase and overcome it several

centuries before Christ.¹ Life is seen as an integral whole. Thus it is no wonder if Gandhi combined these roles, not that there were not occasional taunts from his enemies (he would not consider them so!) that he should retire from politics altogether. Of this later in due order.

In 1915 he started an *āśram*² at Kochrab near Ahmedabad, now capital of modern Gujarat state in West India. He started it to accommodate the members of the Phoenix community who had moved along with him to India from South Africa. A few months later he shifted to another spot on the banks of the Sabarmati river and called it *Satyāgraha āśram*. In the beginning there were twenty-five members and in the course of years it grew to be much larger and there were constant visitors both from India and abroad. After a while, Gandhi formulated a set of rules for them. He divided the community into categories: full members and students (*brahmaçāris*). Students had to live according to the rules but could leave after finishing their course, whereas the full members were permanent residents who took the vows of Truth (*Satya*), *ahimsā*, celibacy (*brahmaçārya*),³ control of the palate (*asvada*), non-stealing (*asteya*), non-possession or poverty (*aparigraha*), fearlessness (*abhaya*). To these were later added vows of *swadēshi*,⁴ *khaddar* (use of home spun cloth), education through the vernaculars, religious use of politics and vows regarding the untouchables. He did have difficulties at the outset but always felt that Providence came to his rescue. In his **Autobiography**, he mentions one such incident when he had nothing for the next day but an unknown person came and gave a large sum of money, enough for a whole year.⁵

¹ DE RIENCOURT, A., *The Soul of India*, London, 1961, p. 297.

² *Āśram*, literally: a refuge. A place where those who sought enlightenment and self-realization lived a community life around a *guru* or spiritual teacher who had reached self-realization. However, Gandhi did not claim himself to be a *guru* but just a spiritual head or father of the *āśram* community which he considered as his family.

³ *Brahmaçārya*, literally: dwelling in the Brahman —God as Ultimate, Foundational reality), it meant the state of being a student. The states that followed it are: householder, renunciant and finally forest-dweller. The student is to be a bachelor and observe chastity, as long as he remains a student. So derivatively the term began to denote a life of chastity.

⁴ *Swadēshi*, literally: ^{of} one's own country. By this was meant local products, preference to what is produced in the neighbourhood rather than what is further away.

⁵ *Autobiography*, part V, ch. X, p. 332.

The year 1917 saw him move to Champaran district, Bihar, North India at the request of the peasants there who were harassed by the unjust demands of the planters. He led a brief successful struggle there and obtained justice for them. At the same time, with the help of volunteers from his *āśram* and elsewhere, he instituted constructive programmes for them such as education and sanitation, but could not continue long since he had to hurry back to Ahmedabad. During the same year he was involved in a struggle in favour of the mill workers who had asked for a rise in pay. Gandhi used *satyāgraha* methods but when he found the workers on the point of being tired and ready to give up, he undertook a fast which he claimed to be a purificatory fast because the workers were giving up their resolve. It had the desired effect, not so much on the workers as on the mill owners who came to a compromise. Towards the end of the year, he was engaged in another struggle. This time it was in the district of Kheda, Bombay Presidency. The rains had failed and as was customary, the revenue taxes should have been reduced or cancelled. The Government did not concede the relief. When all requests were turned down, Gandhi organized the peasants and they undertook to refuse to pay the taxes and suffer the consequences. After much suffering on the part of the peasants, the Government came to a compromise.

In 1918 he willingly undertook to recruit soldiers for World War I and toured the district of Kheda. This surprised many of his friends and admirers, because they had known him as an advocate of non-violence. He had an explanation for it. The *ahimsā* of India was to be from a position of strength and not of weakness or inability to use arms. During this campaign for recruits, he worked too hard and fell ill seriously. By the time he had recovered, the war had ended. But there was a new interest at hand: the Rowlatt Bills. According to this new Bill which the Government passed into an Act, the Government was invested with powers, customary only at the time of war; people could be punished without trial. Gandhi got off his sick bed to lead the popular protests. By this time Gandhi was beginning to be called *mahātmā*.⁶ Though he disliked the term and it even jarred on his ears at times, the word stuck to his name.

⁶ *Mahātmā*, literally: great soul. A terminology so used, perhaps because he was no *guru*, no *saṁnyāsi* (renunciant) since he lived the life of a house-holder, and yet a totally sacrificing person, living for others.

A grave tragedy took place in April 1919. A certain Gen. Dyer massacred innocent people who had gathered for a meeting. This was the notorious Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Punjab. Further, he had passed orders demeaning the natives who had to crawl on their belly while crossing a certain street. There was a wave of protests all over the country. At about the same time the Muslims also had a grievance and had launched the Khilafat Movement.⁷ Mahatma Gandhi now very astutely united both these movements, i.e. anti-Rowlatt and the Khilafat into one, thus uniting both the Hindus and Muslims against the policies of the Government. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Gandhi was the undisputed leader. The Muslim leaders, notably the Ali Brothers worked under him. They demanded that both Gen. Dyer and the Governor of Punjab should be removed and pension denied to them; that Rowlatt Act is to be suspended and the Caliph is to be restored to his powers.

By the end of 1920, since the Government would not yield to their demands, the National Congress resolved to adopt the non-cooperation proposed by Gandhi. In 1921 the Non-Cooperation Movement was launched and Gandhi promised everyone that *swarāj* (self-government/freedom) will come to them within one year if all followed the recommendations of the movement which included: burning of foreign clothes and using of only locally manufactured hand spun cloth, preservation of Hindu-Muslim unity and removal of untouchability. Along with all these, it was resolved to give up government schools, courts, offices, posts in the army, etc. to give up all honorary titles conferred by the Government. Mahatma Gandhi together with the Ali Brothers moved through the length and breadth of the country addressing mass rallies of Hindus, Muslims and others. The enthusiasm of the crowds knew no bounds. Even foreign historians acknowledge this. However, analyzing the conditions of India after World War I, A. de Riencourt says that the masses were disillusioned with the British as an invincible super-power and experiencing their own growing poverty, were unconsciously looking for a leader who would combine two qualities, namely,

⁷ *Khilāfat*, derived from Caliph. Most of the powers of the Caliph were removed and vast territories taken away from him, though the British had promised the Muslims in India to the contrary during the war, in order to secure their cooperation in the war effort. But after the war, the British action appeared to the Muslims to be wrong and perfidious and also an attack on their religion, since they considered the Caliph as their spiritual ruler.

that he be chosen by the rebellious masses and not by any elite group and secondly that he be a religious-minded person. Gandhi fitted these requirements but "whether India was fortunate in finding such a man in Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is perhaps debatable".⁸ Yet he was, as he says "a perfect symbol of the times and was able to be the living, concrete embodiment of the contradictory emotions that were shaking the immense multitude of his countrymen".⁹ Any reading of the **Collected Works** pertaining to those years would place us squarely in the electrifying situation of that time.

Gandhi further enlightened the people through his papers **Young India** in English, **Navajivan** in Gujarati and Hindi. Hundreds of persons gave up their titles, thousands abandoned their lucrative government jobs, lawyers gave up practice, lecturers, teachers and students in their thousands left Government colleges and schools. National schools with national education were started, foreign clothes were burnt in heaps and the ancient spinning wheel was re-introduced. But the cloth produced by this method was not sufficient and Gandhi took the step of dispensing with his shirt and cap, choosing to go only with the loin cloth on September 22, 1921 at Madurai: "It is meant simply to hearten the people, and to make my way clear. Unless I went about with loin cloth, how might I advice others to do likewise?".¹⁰ However, there were some threats, e.g. some wanted to give up the movement if Gandhi persisted in his efforts at eradicating untouchability. Perhaps a little explanation is in place here. Vast numbers were considered to be low castes, that is, outside the traditional four castes of the Aryan society. These so-called low castes were in different categories: they were considered as untouchables, i.e. their touch was supposed to pollute the people who belonged to castes; some of them were considered to be even lower and were considered as unapproachable and invisible, that is, their very approach or sight was supposed to cause pollution to the other castes. Their habits were also revolting to the caste people, e.g. eating of beef, carrion, drinking and their professions which included scavenging. Economically, they were living below the poverty line and barely subsisting. Gandhi could

⁸ DE RIENCOURT, A., *The Soul of India*, p. 312.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *The Hindu*, October 15, 1921, in *CW XXI* (1921) no. 101, p. 226.

not tolerate this inhuman treatment and he did not yield to the pressures from the caste people that he should abandon this work.¹¹

As the stipulated one-year was coming to a close, he made ready his plan for civil disobedience which was the second step in the intensification of the non-cooperation. For this he chose one district, Bardoli in Gujarat, as an experiment. Bardoli was readied for the sacrifice since the people in the district had practised the three conditions, namely, giving up of foreign clothes, keeping Hindu-Muslim unity and removal of untouchability. This situation was explosive and there were sporadic violent incidents in different parts of the country. In February 1922, there was a serious incident at Chauri Chaura in North India. Violent mobs attacked the police and burnt some of them to death. Congressmen had also participated in this violence and Gandhi immediately suspended all the plans for Bardoli experiments and halted all agitations.¹² He undertook a purificatory fast. Many were surprised. It appeared foolish. Just when he had the whole country behind him, he beat a retreat! Perhaps if he had gone ahead, independence would have come but then it would have meant unabated violence. But he was convinced about the correctness of his decision. Two years later when a reader taunted him: "Pray do not create a second Bardoli", he replied: "I am so proud of my performance at Bardoli that there is every prospect of my repeating it",¹³ (and he did it). The Government was immensely relieved and moved in by arresting the leaders; Gandhi was also arrested; he pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to six years in prison. He was a model prisoner, read many books and tried to learn languages. He also learnt the value of silence. He notes in his prison diary, entry of September 20, 1922: "Observance of silence ended yesterday. Experienced supreme

¹¹ Cf. CW XIX (1920-1921) no. 10, p. 7-9; also no. 284, p. 569-570. It is, however, surprising to note that at the beginning of this stage II, he did not feel himself called to such a work for the removal of untouchability, etc. He mentions in *Young India* (June 30, 1927), how in 1915, a social worker Hari Narayan Apte had pleaded with him at the Servants of India Society's Quarters in Pune that they should work for the suppressed classes. But Gandhi at that time had said that it would be better to work among the so-called higher classes rather than agitate among the suppressed classes. But Gandhi had not yet seen the situation at this time. He says: "I was new to this work. I had not drunk deep of the ocean of miseries in which the suppressed classes were drowned" [CW XXXIV (1927) no. 74, p. 76].

¹² CW XXII (1921-1922) no. 177, p. 423-425; no. 174, p. 415.

¹³ Cf. *Young India*, April 17, 1924, in CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 351, p. 459.

joy during the period of silence ... Have again started observing silence".¹⁴ From then on, he began a life long practice of a day of silence, every Monday.

In February 1924, he was released from prison on health grounds and underwent an operation for appendicitis. He found that during his stay in prison, the political situation in the country had changed. The *Khilāfat* issue had become a non-issue since Turkey under their revolutionary leader Kemal Pasha Atatürk had abolished the system of Caliphs. The Hindus and Muslims drifted apart. The Congress itself was split over the issue of partial cooperation with the Government. Some wanted to enter the newly established advisory councils that were open to them, so that they could take part in the deliberations, though they said they would enter the councils to wreck them. Gandhi opposed, but a new party of *Swarājists* was founded. In the 1924 Congress meeting, Gandhi, in order to keep at least a semblance of unity, allowed that they could function from within the Congress and the Congress would passively cooperate with them. Meanwhile the National Schools were in disarray, many had closed, many students and teachers had returned to Government schools. But Gandhi did not give up, and tried to keep the few remaining institutions alive. In 1925, he accepted to be the Congress President for the year to keep both the groups together and present a united front. However, he was disillusioned and felt that his going away from the political scene for a while would help. Accordingly, he announced that he was retiring from active politics for one year (1926), during which he would observe political silence and concentrate only on what he called constructive work, i.e. the spinning wheel and *khaddar* work, removal of untouchability, widow remarriage, etc. He retired to his Sabarmati *āśram* and rarely stirred out of it in spite of many requests. It was during this time that he gave his daily discourses on *Bhagavad Gītā*. We see also that during this stage, his correspondence with curious foreigners, both admirers and critics, increased especially from England, USA, Germany and France. Some foreigners also joined his *āśram*, notable among them is one Miss Slade, an English lady, daughter of a retired Rear Admiral of the Royal Navy of Britain, who took an Indian name and was fondly called by the *āśramites* as Mirabehn.

¹⁴ CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 70, p. 150.

II. A genuine search for God

A. A search for Truth

During this stage, Gandhi perceived more clearly that a search for God is co-terminus with a search for Truth. He had been seeing it dimly in the previous stage and feeling it to be so but the breath-taking events of 1920-1922 had experientially shown him that indeed God is Truth. How this would further change to 'Truth is God', we shall consider during the next stage. Now it still remained for the greater part a clear verbalization of his perception that God is Truth and his search for God is but a search for Truth:

*The word **satya** comes from **sat**, which means 'to be', 'to exist'. Only God is ever the same through all time. A thousand times honour to him who has succeeded, through love and devotion for this **satya**, in opening out his heart permanently to its presence. I have been but striving to serve that truth ... I know that I am still very far from that truth.*¹⁵

His eagerness to see this God-Truth is easily perceivable in his various writings and speeches at this stage: "I want to see God face to face. God I know is Truth".¹⁶ Writing to a certain Mr. Edward Murphy of New York, at about the same time: "There is no search greater than that of Truth".¹⁷ But he was conscious that his search for Truth has not ended. He was still in the process, still making his 'experiments with truth'. Answering to a critic who had written that Gandhi had missed his vocation in life by becoming a politician instead of remaining a saint, he writes:

*I think that the word 'saint' should be ruled out of present life. It is too sacred a word to be lightly applied to anybody, much less to one like myself who claims to be a humble searcher after truth, knows his limitations, makes mistakes, never hesitates to admit them when he makes them, and frankly confesses that he, like a scientist, is making, experiments about some of 'the eternal verities' of life, but cannot even claim to be a scientist because he can show no tangible proof of scientific accuracy in his methods or such tangible results of his experiments as modern science demands ...*¹⁸

¹⁵ Navajivan, November 20, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 203, p. 473..

¹⁶ Young India, April 4, 1922, in CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 254, p. 340.

¹⁷ CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 281, p. 367.

¹⁸ Young India, May 12, 1920, in CW XVII (1920) no. 165, p. 406.

This spirit of experimentation and searching enabled him to be ready to change, changing and shifting according to various situations but at the same time remaining firm in his concern for Truth above all: "To me I seem to be constantly changing and shifting my ground. To me I seem to be constantly growing. I must respond to varying conditions, and yet remain changeless within".¹⁹

This search for Truth also led him to accept his mistakes and errors of judgment. Thus he realized that he had erred and taken the enthusiasm of the crowds to be their readiness to follow his programme thoroughly. He had proceeded too hastily to organize the civil disobedience without having ascertained whether people had been truly converted at heart. And so he had to suspend the proposed civil disobedience in February 1922 when violence had broken out in a serious form. It was a disappointment but this is how he consoled himself and others: "This is true of every ideal. As a person becomes ever more truthful, truth runs farther away from him because he knows that what he mistakenly thought to be truth was not really the truth".²⁰ That there was a growth in this perception of Truth, he himself confesses, writing on March 16, 1922 to his benefactor and friend Jamnalal Bajaj on the eve of his historical trial: "As I proceed in my quest for Truth, it grows upon me that Truth comprehends everything ... I have now a more vivid sense of Truth and of my own littleness than I had a year ago".²¹ Indeed, during the previous year it had been one of great show and adulation. There were not wanting people who compared him to Sri Kṛiṣṇa or Buddha or even Christ, and pictures were also printed to that effect. Gandhi vigorously protested against it: "I am painfully aware of my imperfections. I am but a humble creature aspiring after *mōkṣa* and striving towards perfection ...".²² He was also conscious that his consciousness of imperfections need not be a weakness but an asset since it only moves him to search for Truth with even greater vigour:

¹⁹ *Young India*, August 20, 1925, in CW XXVIII (1925) no. 47, p. 87.

²⁰ *Navajivan*, February 19, 1922, in CW XXII (1921-1922) no. 177, p. 423.

²¹ CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 48, p. 97.

²² *Navajivan*, July 17, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 191, p. 390; cf. also the interesting entry comparing him to Jesus and his reply: *Young India*, September 11, 1924, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 84, p. 117.

*I claim to be making ceaseless effort to find it (Truth). But I admit that I have not yet found it ... I am painfully conscious of my imperfections, and therein lies all the strength I possess because it is a rare thing for a man to know his own limitations.*²³

Three years later, he went even further in confessing his own drawbacks:

*I tremble because my friends regard me as the best man. If I come to believe it, it will bring about my downfall, because I have yet far to climb. My aspirations have no bounds. Many are the inner enemies whom I have to conquer. The deeper I ponder, the better I come to realize my drawback.*²⁴

But this is not to say that perfection is impossible or only an ideal. He was conscious that it was a long drawn out process: "To say that perfection is not attainable on this earth is to deny God ... Life to me would lose all its interest if I felt that I could not attain perfect love on earth".²⁵

This search for Truth he also describes as the effort towards *mōkṣa*.²⁶ Thus writing to one Mathurdas Trikumji with whom he used to exchange spiritual ideas, he writes on November 11, 1921 that his desire for *mōkṣa* was uppermost but that he was not yet ready; much effort has to go into it and he was striving for it and that all his actions were directed towards it:

*For me, even the effort for attaining swarāj is part of the effort for mōkṣa. Writing this to you is also part of the same effort. If I find it a hindrance in the path of mōkṣa, my pen would drop this moment, such is my yearning for mōkṣa.*²⁷

Gandhi experienced this search for God, for Truth, for *mōkṣa* in a very concrete manner. Various events and situations gave concrete shape to this search. After all, his was a life-long project, there could be errors but these can be overcome and the direction can be kept steady towards Truth. In this search others could join him. Whenever anyone spoke of being his disciple or follower, he immediately replied that he was not a master nor did he have

²³ Young India, November 17, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 195, p. 457.

²⁴ Navajivan, April 13, 1924, in CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 333, p. 431.

²⁵ Letter to Miss Esther Faering, Danish Missionary in South India, on January 13, 1918, in CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 70, p. 146.

²⁶ *Mōkṣa* has the connotations of bliss, heaven, liberation from birth-rebirth cycle.

²⁷ CW XXI (1921) no. 163, p. 376

followers or disciples.²⁸ Each one must search but they are welcome to search in his company. Welcoming a Danish missionary, Miss Esther Faering who wanted to stay at the Sabarmati āśram, he writes on December 7, 1919:

*Your coming is a joy to me. It will be a greater joy, if upon your experience you find it gives you peace, health and real joy and if thereby it enables the other Christians to see that God and Christianity can be found also in institutions that do not call themselves Christian and that truth is the same in all religions though through refraction it appears for the time being variegated even as light does through a prism.*²⁹

B. His concept of God at this stage

The second stage coincides with the period when he was able to achieve the greatest rapport with Muslims and hence in his concept of God during this stage, he tries to combine everything possible so that it would be acceptable to all. But this is not to say that he was only an eclectic but rather, in line with his fundamental assertion that he is an experimenter, he is but trying his best to reach out to Truth. Replying to a friend who had asked him to be consistent when he spoke of God and not to mislead others, he replies: "I talk of God exactly as I believe Him to be. Why should I beguile people unto error and work my own perdition? I seek no reward from them".³⁰ And writing from his Sabarmati āśram to an enquirer on April 3, 1926, he declares: "I wish to see God face to face not as I would like to see Him but exactly as He is".³¹

In an appeal addressed to the citizens of Bombay on November 11, 1921 in the wake of violent disturbances on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales, he appeals in the name of God: "There is only one God for us all, whether we find him through the Koran, the Bible, the Zend-Avesta, the Talmud or the Gītā. And He is God of Truth and Love. I have no interest in living save for proving this faith in one".³² He has a similar assertion

²⁸ CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 358, p. 469-470.

²⁹ CW XVI (1919-1920) no. 214, p. 333.

³⁰ Young India, January 1, 1926, in CW XXIX (1925-1926) no. 142, p. 411.

³¹ CW XXX (1926) no. 261, p. 226.

³² Young India, November 24, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 199, p. 466.

about the oneness of God. When writing to a Muslim who had said that the Muslims were ready to accept the sacredness of the Vēdas if the Hindus also accepted the sacredness of the Koran, the oneness of God and genuineness of Mohammed and His prophet, he writes:

*God is certainly one. He has no second. He is unfathomable, unknowable and unknown to the vast majority of mankind. He is everywhere. He sees without eyes, and hears without ears. He is formless and indivisible. He is uncreated, has no father, mother or child; and yet He allows Himself to be worshipped as father, mother, wife and child. He allows Himself even to be worshipped as stock and stone, although He is none of these things. He is the most elusive. He is the nearest to us if we would but know the fact. But He is farthest from us when we do not so realize His omnipresence. There are many gods in the Vēdas. Other scriptures call them angels. But the Vēdas sing of only one God.*³³

For him, God is essentially the indescribable and we are but seeking to know the unknown and as such speech falters and we tend to speak of Him in inadequate and even contradictory terms.³⁴ In reply to a certain Nadkarni S.D. who had objected to Gandhi's calling of Buddhists, Jains and the atheists as theists, Gandhi replies that what they unconsciously term as *karma* or fate or life-struggle, is an implicit acknowledgement of God: "He is the Denial of the atheist".³⁵ God is mysterious and unique and he asks: "If we cannot comprehend Him with our mind, how can our poor speech describe Him?"³⁶ Yet one has to somehow speak of Him and Gandhi chooses to speak of Him as Truth: "God is Truth. All else is unreal and false. Other things, therefore, can be true only in a relative sense".³⁷ His description of God includes these: "Supreme unseen Force",³⁸ "Solace in the midst of the severest fire".³⁹ In his address as the Congress President for the year, he declares condemning the arrogance of some Hindus who considered themselves as superior and looked down upon others as low: "God's grace and

³³ *Young India*, September 25, 1924, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 130, p. 178.

³⁴ *Young India*, January 21, 1926, in CW XXIX (1925-1926) no. 142, p. 412.

³⁵ *Young India*, April 30, 1925, in CW XXVI (1925) no. 324, p. 571.

³⁶ CW XXX (1926) no. 462, p. 571.

³⁷ *Navajivan*, November 20, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 203, p. 473.

³⁸ Speech on Buddha Jayanti (Birthday of Buddha) at Bombay on May 18, 1924, in CW XXIV (1924) no. 43, p. 86.

³⁹ Letter to Jawharlal Nehru on April 25, 1925, in CW XXVI (1924-1925) no. 309, p. 545.

revelation are the monopoly of no race or nation ... God is Light not darkness. God is Love, not hate. God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is Great. We His creatures are but dust".⁴⁰

During his first prison term in India, he wrote a model text book for children. There, in lesson no. 3, he gives a simple example to describe God as Omnipresence. Put in the mouth of the mother instructing her child, it reads: "We do not see God, but He sees us. I see you even when you are asleep, being awake myself, but you do not see me. Likewise, may it not be that God sees us even if we do not see Him?".⁴¹ One of the readers of *Navajivan* had asked him how could we meditate on God when he is without form, he answers that though God is without form and could be apprehended through meditation, He could be more easily meditated through His manifestation in personal forms and he goes on to say: "In this age and in this country, that form is *daridranārāyana*".⁴² The only way of meditating on Him is to serve the poor".⁴³ Similarly, speaking at a cultivators' conference on January 15, 1925, he tells them in no uncertain terms that they should treat better the untouchables who laboured in their fields for a pittance: "The gods are not in heaven. For you, they are among the untouchables; they belong to the labouring class. The poverty stricken people of India are her gods".⁴⁴ In almost a similar vein he addressed the Christian missionaries at Calcutta on July 28, 1925, telling them that he missed in them receptiveness, humility and willingness to identify themselves with the masses of India and then goes on to say emphatically: "You cannot present the hungry

⁴⁰ CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 382, p. 479.

⁴¹ CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 61, p. 124.

⁴² *Daridra* means destitute and *Nārāyana* is a name for God, denoting *Viṣṇu*. So *Daridranārāyana* is the form of God as present in the destitute.

The Hindu, July 4, 1927 reports a speech given by Gandhi to the citizens of Bangalore at Khadi exhibition on July 3, 1927, wherein Gandhi mentions that it was the late Deshbandu Chittaranjan Das, a nationalist leader in Bengal who had used the expression *Daridranārāyana*. Gandhi had taken up this slogan from him: "I stand before you as a self-chosen representative of the dumb, semi-starved, because workless millions of India whom the late Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das appropriately called *Daridranārāyana*" (CW XXXIV (1927) no. 93, p. 103). Note, however, that Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) had already used the same expression.

⁴³ *Navajivan*, September 19, 1926, in CW XXXI (1926) no. 461, p. 429-430.

⁴⁴ *Navajivan*, January 25, 1925, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 440, p. 603.

and famished masses with God. Their god is their food".⁴⁵ He sees himself as a *dāsānudāsa*⁴⁶ in imitation of God who bears that title. He mentions this, on the eve of his trial and incarceration, in a letter to Jamnalal Bajaj saying that anyone who has achieved an extinction of the ego becomes the very image of Truth and thus like God whose loving name is *Dāsānudāsa*.⁴⁷

His relation with God seems to be very personal and on intimate terms. A certain *Vaiṣṇavite*⁴⁸ had taken exception to Gandhi's way of writing and speaking about God in familiar terms. Instead of calling him 'Sri Rāmachandra Prabhu',⁴⁹ Gandhi had shortened it to the popular 'Rāma' and spoke in second person singular. Gandhi replies:

There was a time in my life when I knew Rama as Sri Ramachandra. But that time has now passed. Rama has now come into my home. I know that He would frown on me if I spoke to Him as 'You' [second person plural]. To me an orphan without father, mother, brother, Rama is all in all. My mother, my father, my brother —He is everything to me. My life is His. In Him I live. I see Him in all women and so regard everyone of them as my mother or sister. I see Him in all men and, therefore, look on everyone as father, brother or son according to his age. In the Bhangi⁵⁰ and the Brahmin, I see the same Rama and to them I bow.⁵¹

And on another occasion, he speaks of God who dwells within us: "God is not in Kaaba or in Kashi. He is within everyone of us".⁵² (Kaaba is sacred for Muslims and is in Mecca while Kashi or Benares in India is the sacred place for Hindus).

He always had a lively faith in God's providence and God directing each of his moves and he felt strongly that God saved him on innumerable

45 *Young India*, August 6, 1925, in CW XXVII (1925) no. 275, p. 439

46 *Dāsa* means a servant and *Dāsānudāsa* stands for 'servant of servants'.

47 CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 48, p. 98.

48 *Vaiṣṇavite* worshippers of *Viṣṇu*, a Hindu deity.

49 An *avatār* or 'incarnation' of *Viṣṇu*.

50 Bhangi, a caste of scavengers.

51 *Navajivan*, June 6, 1924, in CW XXIV (1924) no. 101, p. 197.

52 *Young India*, December 26, 1924, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 375, p. 451.

occasions and in various situations.⁵³ He felt that God's ways were mysterious and natural calamities were perhaps his own mystery as destroyer and creator.⁵⁴ We can do nothing except through His will. He is Supreme and we cannot but obey.⁵⁵

Quite frequently Gandhi claimed that he decided on a course of action after hearing 'the still small voice within'. Thus he had to part company with his friend and adviser Pandit Malaviya who was not for the Non-Cooperation Movement: "When, however, the still small voice within me suggests otherwise, I become helpless and cannot meekly submit even to his advice".⁵⁶ In the course of a prepared statement on April 4, 1917, before the District Magistrate, Motihari, Bihar, India and replying as to why he had not obeyed the order to quit the district:

*I have ventured to make this statement not in any way in extenuation of the penalty to be awarded against me, but to show that I disregarded the order served upon me, not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience of the higher law of our being —the voice of conscience.*⁵⁷

To a correspondent who had accused Gandhi of listening to a supposed inner voice and not rather to wise people, he writes: "I give prime importance to my inner voice. Opposed to it, even the works of great men have, they ought to have no weight on me ... everyone can be what I am and hear the inner voice. The man who hears it had gained the strongest support".⁵⁸ Similarly, when he undertook a seven day's fast to expiate the sins of his *āśramites* at the Sabarmati *āśram*, many protested his action but he defended it on the grounds of obedience to the still voice within, which was his only guide since he had no other guru: "I shall lose my usefulness the moment I stifle the still small voice within".⁵⁹ What is this conscience that he

⁵³ Cf. *Autobiography*, part I, ch. XXI, p. 61; also cf. *CW XXIX* (1925-1926) no. 1, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Navajivan*, August 17, 1924, in *CW XXV* (1924-1925) no. 3, p. 2.

⁵⁵ To the mill workers of Ahmedabad during their strike, on May 23, 1920, in *CW XVII* (1920) no. 194, p. 447.

⁵⁶ *Navajivan*, August 8, 1920, in *CW XVIII* (1920) no. 87, p. 123.

⁵⁷ *CW XIII* (1915-1917) no. 285, p. 375.

⁵⁸ *Navajivan*, November 10, 1921, in *CW XXI* (1921) no. 182, p. 419.

⁵⁹ *Young India*, December 3, 1925, in *CW XXIX* (1925-1926) no. 21, p. 290-291.

speaks of? Writing in **Young India**, August 21, 1924, he defined it as "a quality or state acquired by laborious training" and gives many examples to clarify what he understands by conscience:

*Wilfulness is not conscience ... conscience is the ripe fruit of strictest discipline. Irresponsible youngsters therefore who have never obeyed anything or anybody save their animal instinct have no conscience, nor therefore have all grown up people ... It is safe to say that when a man makes everything a matter of conscience, he is a stranger to it ... A conscientious man hesitates to assert himself, he is always humble, never boisterous, always compromising, always ready to listen, ever willing, even anxious to admit his mistakes.*⁶⁰

In another context, when he found his friends and colleagues deserting, he says that he had not been able even to retain the friendship of the British due to the voice of conscience and here he identifies the voice of conscience with the voice of God: "God, means the voice of conscience. If, I hear it say that I must sacrifice the world's friendship, I would be ready to do so".⁶¹

God, he felt, was one who forgives. To a certain Mr. Yakub Hasan who had asked his forgiveness for breaking the promises in connection with the Non-Cooperation Movement, he says that he himself is weak and would perhaps have succumbed in a similar situation. Therefore it is only God who could forgive. He concludes by saying: "When a man confesses before Him his weakness with a pure and humble heart, He forgives. Being weak ourselves let us not throw a stone at a brother who has confessed his weakness".⁶²

Before we conclude, we should ask again the question raised in Stage I. Did Gandhi consider God as personal or impersonal? Opinions are divided on this question. Some are quite emphatic that Gandhi considered God to be impersonal and argue from the background of Indian philosophy and religion which obviously influenced his explicit speaking;⁶³ while

⁶⁰ CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 13, p. 23-24.

⁶¹ **Navajivan**, March 1, 1925, in CW XXVI (1925) no. 80, p. 172.

⁶² **Young India**, July 28, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 217, p. 435.

⁶³ Cf. RICHARDS, G., "Gandhi's Concept of Truth and the Advaita Traditions", in **Religious Studies** 22 (March 1986) 1-14; cf. also THAKUR, S.C., "Gandhi's God", in **Indian Philosophical Quarterly** 11 (1971) 485-495.

others argue from his sentiments and practice.⁶⁴ There are also others who try a middle path saying that he combines both and when he speaks of God as impersonal, he is only denying all the limitations implied by the concept of person.⁶⁵

In March 1925, on three different days, he writes about his views on the various images we use for God. The first appeared in **Young India**, March 3, 1925 as a reply to someone who objected to the use of the word 'God' in the Congress pledge since there were some atheists, Buddhists and Jains who could not seriously mention God. He says that we may all have different definitions for 'God' but behind all that we are bound to discover a common denominator. He is something that could be described in so many ways including atheism: "He is even the atheism of the atheist ... He is personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need his touch".⁶⁶ To another correspondent who had sought to be enlightened regarding the validity of image worship, he writes in **Navajivan** on March 15, 1925 that the image is not God and yet could be a help for 'rapt contemplation'. If sons and daughters could use photographs of parents to recall and refresh their memories of parents, why not a devotee use images for God: "God is omnipresent, even a pebble in the Narmada can represent Him and serve as an object of worship".⁶⁷ Obviously the question did not leave his mind. He had been to a temple in Kanyakumari, southernmost tip of India, where, while circumambulating the temple according to custom, certain thoughts struck his mind and he writes of them in **Navajivan**, March 29, 1925. It is an interesting defence of idolatry and at the same time exposing the hidden idolatry of those who oppose it. The quote, though long, is worth reproducing:

I did not pity the ignorance of the idolatrous Hindu, but, on the contrary, realized his wisdom. By discovering the way of image-worship, he has not multiplied the one God into many, but realized the fact and shown it to the world that man can worship—and he will continue to worship— God

⁶⁴ Cf. ANDREWS, C.F., *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, London, 1929, p. 34 sq; JONES, E.S., *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation*, London, 1948, p. 112 sq; THEKKINEDATH, J., *Love of Neighbour in Mahatma Gandhi*, Alwaye, 1973, p. 36-41.

⁶⁵ KHANNA, S., *Gandhi and the Good Life*, Delhi, 1985, p. 23 sq.

⁶⁶ CW XXVI (1925) no. 132, p. 224-225.

⁶⁷ CW XXVI (1925) no. 175, p. 309.

in His diverse forms. Although the Christians and Muslims do not regard themselves as idolaters, nevertheless, those who worship their ideals are also image-worshippers. A mosque or a church also involved a form of image-worship. Imagining that one can become more holy only by going to these places is a form of idol worship, and there is no harm in such a belief. Even the faith that God is revealed only in the Koran or the Bible is idol-worship and an innocent one. The Hindu goes further and says that everyone should worship God in the form he likes. Even a person who makes an idol of stone or gold or silver and after attributing divinity to it, purifies himself by meditating on it will be fully qualified to attain mokṣa.⁶⁸

What then shall we say in conclusion? To me it appears that Gandhi's personal belief is in a personal, intimate God who was real to him and whose presence he constantly felt in various ways, chiefly through his delicate and informed conscience. However, whenever he had to express this in explicit language, he finds it inadequate to express fully what he felt and so he takes refuge in the traditional terminology of Indian philosophy and religion, since they at least seem to justify to some extent what he wants to say. Thus it is that his description has been taken to mean that he believed in an impersonal God. It would be, perhaps, better to say that for him, God is neither personal nor impersonal but far beyond this. Even in Catholic theology when we describe God as three distinct Persons, it would be wrong to speak of God as Person in the same manner as I speak of myself and other human beings as persons. We are individuals and as such are not only distinct but separate beings. We are as persons essentially closed but destined to open up to discover our true selves as 'persons' in dialogue with others. Could we speak of the three Persons of the Trinity in the same manner, is doubtful, if not out right wrong. In the Trinity, the three Persons are Persons precisely because they are open to one another and necessarily related, which is constitutive of their personhood. So, they are not persons in comparison with human persons and could consequently be called impersonal or perhaps to avoid confusion, Supra-Persons in pseudo-Dionysian terminology. So then, we understand in a way that, when Gandhi speaks of God as impersonal, it is not something incompatible with belief in a personal God. In fact, it would be a good perception.

⁶⁸ CW XXVI (1925) no. 238, p. 425.

III. A genuine concern for others as an integral part of search for God-Truth

Service to the country, to the millions of India, was uppermost in Gandhi's thought, right from the time of his return to India from South Africa in 1915. Indeed, it was this thought that made him quit South Africa when he realized that greater service needed to be done in India. His advice to others, too, was service. All his *āśram* vows were geared to train people for such a service. Thus writing on February 2, 1918 to young Vinoba Bhave who followed in his footsteps, he says: "It is true as you say that, though outside the *āśram*, you have scrupulously observed its rules ... may God grant you long life and use you for the uplift of India".⁶⁹ Similarly, writing to a certain Anandibai and consoling her for the death of her sister-in-law: "Let this give you what solace it can. For persons like you who have dedicated themselves to service, there is only one way to mourn a death and that is to dedicate themselves all the more to service".⁷⁰ Writing to his son Ramdas in South Africa and remarking how every member of the immediate family is scattered in different places, he notes: "May be, in this separation lies service to the nation and the way to spiritual uplift".⁷¹ This way of serving others he felt was to imitate God Himself who serves:

*The happy man exerts himself to relieve the sufferings of others, and the king to raise the beggar to his level, which means that, though a king, he voluntarily becomes a beggar. God, the Ruler, earns his title to rule by making Himself the slave of his slave, making Himself worthy of worship by purifying the sinner.*⁷²

Gandhi says that he could not remain unmoved when he saw the situation of the people: "I would be less than human if with all my knowledge of avoidable misery pervading the land and of the sight of mere skeletons under the very shadow of the Lord of the universe, I did not feel with and for all the suffering but dumb millions of India".⁷³ This service he felt, should be unselfish and not for any personal gain. In his **Discourses on the Gītā**,

⁶⁹ CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 110, p. 188.

⁷⁰ CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 120, p. 197.

⁷¹ CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 136, p. 221.

⁷² Navajivan, May 22, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 59, p. 118.

⁷³ Young India, November 17, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 195, p. 458.

no. 85, June 19, 1926, he says that we may serve others because the Lord dwells in them: "We should immediately run to him and help him. We should help the Lord crying in distress. After doing what was needed, we should feel that it was all a dream".⁷⁴ Thus Gandhi canalized his search for God-Truth in a life of service and it gave meaning to his life.

A. The basis for this service is human solidarity

One of the bases for Gandhi's love for others is his deep conviction in the oneness of all living reality. This is nothing new but part of the traditional Indian thought, and especially dear to the Jains who abound in Gujarat, Gandhi's home state. Perhaps Gandhi's originality here is that he had learnt to present it to different audiences in a way that is applicable to them. Thus speaking at a meeting of Christians in Calcutta on August 4, 1925, he connects it with brotherhood, on which he had been asked to speak. He said that he was not conscious of having hated anyone at any time. How he came to this state, he himself did not know but that had been his life-long practice. Then he goes on to declare: "My philosophy, my religion teaches me that brotherhood is not confined merely to the human species; that is, if we really have imbibed the spirit of brotherhood, it extends to the lower animals".⁷⁵ Responding in his turn to the call of Muslims on all Muslims in India to observe October 19, 1919 as the day of prayer and fasting to press for justice to be done in the problem of *Khilāfat*, Gandhi called on the Hindus and others to join the Muslims in solidarity for this fast because they too are our brethren. Sharing in their suffering is a sign of brotherly regard and a feeling of oneness.⁷⁶

By far, the almost daily discourses he held on **Bhagavad Gītā** during his year of political silence at the Sabarmati *āśram*, provides an insight into his thinking. Thus in discourse no. 80, June 13, 1926, he says that we are all one and not only we, human beings but all living and non-living beings

⁷⁴ CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 222.

⁷⁵ CW XXVIII (1925) no. 10, p. 19.

⁷⁶ Navajivan, October 12, 1919, in CW XVI (1919-1920) no. 144, p. 230-231.

along with God are one.⁷⁷ On a later date, he gives an interesting example: "As ice becomes what it is from water, so we have all come from the same water and shall turn again to that water".⁷⁸ In another of his discourses, he mentions that all our *ātman*s are one and only have outward differences and that too because of our ignorance but in truth we are all same and hence we can have no enemy and there can be no place for any violence against anybody.⁷⁹ We see here how he bases his non-violence and love of others on the *Gītā*. Similarly, he would base his consideration of equality of all human beings on the *Gītā* and so he could speak of treating the untouchables as equals with all the caste people: "It is only if we have faith in our hearts that we are all one, though we exist as separate beings, it is only then that we can feel a sense of equality. Otherwise even two leaves are not equal".⁸⁰ Even sinners and *sādhus*⁸¹ could be equated. The difference is that while the former's *ātman* has a thick layer of uncleanness, it has disappeared from the latter's. And hence both must be equally respected.⁸² This solidarity that we have with all beings has other consequences as well. It could also mean that our failing to do good can harm others and even the whole world:

*We cannot have personal relation with all beings in the world, but can have spiritual relation with them. Anyone who feels no desire to do good to others harms not only himself but others too ... Some of us may be inclined to ask how the world is concerned if we harm ourselves. But in harming ourselves, we harm both ourselves and the world*⁸³.

Earlier, during a disturbance at Nadiad in 1919, some persons had indulged in violence when Gandhi had been arrested. They had destroyed railway property. Gandhi appealed to the offenders to come forward, acknowledge their fault and receive courageously whatever punishment the Government laid on them. His reasoning was: "A hidden sin is like a poison corrupting

⁷⁷ CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 218.

⁷⁸ Discourse no. 107, July 15, 1926, in CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 248.

⁷⁹ Discourse no. 62, May 6, 1926, in CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 189.

⁸⁰ Discourse no. 23, March 21, 1926, in CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86 p. 121.

⁸¹ *Sādhus*, a term applied to renunciants wandering in search of self-realization.

⁸² Discourse no. 99, July 7, 1926, in CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 240.

⁸³ Discourse no. 120, July 27, 1926, in CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 263-264.

the whole body. The sooner the poison is thrown off, the better it is for society".⁸⁴

Because of this solidarity and oneness with all, there could be joy in suffering for others and it comes spontaneously to the *ātman* to make such a sacrifice: "If there is any real happiness in this transient world, it lies in suffering at the suffering of others, in dying while protecting others. He who lives in this way, ever lives in bliss".⁸⁵ It was also because of this, he intervened when some of his fellow prisoners were flogged for disobedience. He requested that he be allowed to speak to them and make them obey. In his letter to the prison superintendent on July 9, 1923, he says that he tried to keep quiet, reminding himself that he was only a prisoner but he failed: "I cannot forget that I am a human being, or public worker and reformer ...".⁸⁶

The idea which he had formulated and felt in South Africa, namely, that even if there were one genuine *satyāgrahi*, his movement would succeed, persisted. The circumstances and situations were different in India, compared to South Africa. Here it was a question of masses, there it was only hundreds or at the most a few thousands but Gandhi remained firm in his conviction. Thus replying to Disorders Inquiry Committee on January 9, 1920, he holds that "the success of the movement depends upon the existence of one full *satyāgrahi*".⁸⁷ And when one of the members of the committee taunted him asking whether more numbers of *satyāgrahis* would mean a faster achievement, Gandhi replied that in the matter of soul-force it is not a mathematical calculation: "It is not like the question of an ordinary soldier, that if one man can shoot ten, then ten men will be able to shoot 100".⁸⁸

Sometimes he felt that even he was not yet perfect as a *satyāgrahi* and hence the movement has not really achieved its goal. Thus writing to his secretary Mahadev Desai on November 11, 1921, he says:

⁸⁴ *Young India*, July 9, 1919, in *CW XV* (1918-1919) no. 394, p. 438-439.

⁸⁵ *Navajivan*, November 11, 1921, in *CW XXI* (1921) no. 202, p. 472.

⁸⁶ *CW XXIII* (1922-1924) no. 85, p. 169.

⁸⁷ *CW XVI* (1919-1920) no. 240, p. 410.

⁸⁸ *CW XVI* (1919-1920) no. 240, p. 435.

I know, of course, if I can completely follow non-violence, truth and brahmaçārya in action, speech and thought, then we should certainly get swarāj⁸⁹ this year; we may also get it if someone else from among us can do these things; or if the tapas⁹⁰ of all of us taken together proves sufficient for the purpose. In the first instance, however, I have not given up this hope in regard to myself.⁹¹

And again in the same vein he writes in his paper **Navajivan**, November 11, 1921: "If we have, before 31st December, even one person who will follow truth to this perfect degree, *swarāj* is a certainty".⁹²

B. The basis for this service is human dignity

Gandhi's work for Truth and Justice proceeded also from the high esteem in which he held human dignity, self-respect of the individual and of the nation. It was necessary to become conscious of our human dignity and also help others discover it and live in dignity and self-respect. Writing on March 15, 1924 to one Mr. A.A. Paul, General Secretary of the Student Christian Association in India, Burma and Ceylon, he comments on the lack of courage on the part of Christian missionaries in South Africa to stand for truth and justice:

There is unfortunately too much of expedience even amongst some of the best of them. They think that standing for truth in the face of prejudice will impair their usefulness for service. I have always dissented from this view, and my humble opinion based upon extensive experience is that such an attitude is a concession, although totally unconscious to satan.⁹³

For him there was no such consideration of expediency. He was prepared for all sacrifices in this conscientizing process. Thus during the Non-Cooperation Movement, he explained on January 19, 1921 at Vadtal, a place of

⁸⁹ *Swarāj* means independence or more literally: 'self-rule', 'mastery of oneself'. For Gandhi, it meant more than political freedom; it meant above all self-reliance, self-respect, equality of all. Cf. also JESUDASAN, I., **A Gandhian Theology of Liberation**, New York, 1984, p. 87 sq. He interprets *swarāj* as 'liberation' but this is only an interpretative meaning (read ch. II of the work). It is valid, though the literal meaning is different.

⁹⁰ *Tapas* means 'penance' or 'austerities'.

⁹¹ CW XXI (1921) no. 176, p. 400.

⁹² CW XXI (1921) no. 204, p. 474-475.

⁹³ CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 158, p. 257.

pilgrimage, how he had somehow tolerated the Government when it was robbing them only of money but when he discovered that they have begun to rob the self-respect of the people by unjust laws, restricting people's liberty, he had woken up and resolved that it could not be tolerated.⁹⁴ About this time, the Duke of Connaught had come on an official visit to India and the Government hoped that his coming would create a better atmosphere. Gandhi was forthright in his declaration: "We desire to live on terms of friendship with the Englishmen, but that friendship must be friendship of equals both in theory and practice".⁹⁵ He encouraged his countrymen to fearlessness and a realization of their dignity as human beings, endowed with immortal soul: "Even a little girl who has, and knows that she has, a soul of shining purity can stand up to an overbearing Englishman, six-and-a-half foot tall ... The day the people of India come to have self-respect, they will be strong".⁹⁶ This coming into their birth right of self-confidence is part of the independence for which they were longing: "Winning *swarāj* means helping the country to overcome its lack of faith in itself and to inspire self-confidence in it".⁹⁷

He respected the reasoning capacity of even the illiterate people and when he was accused of appealing to people's emotions and exciting their passions, he asserts that he always tried to put the most abstruse truths in simplest terms so that even the illiterate people could understand.⁹⁸ Similarly, he would say boldly: "I have no desire to carry a single soul with me, if I cannot appeal to his or her reason".⁹⁹ It had been said by some, that the poor are suffering because of their past *karma*¹⁰⁰ and hence one need not bother about them. Gandhi reacts to this strongly in a letter to one Miss

⁹⁴ CW XIX (1920-1921) no. 129, p. 252.

⁹⁵ CW XIX (1920-1921) no. 154, p. 312.

⁹⁶ CW XVIII (1920) no. 37, p. 58.

⁹⁷ *Navajivan*, June 26, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 128, p. 271.

⁹⁸ *Young India*, October 27, 1920, in CW XVIII (1920) no. 216, p. 384.

⁹⁹ CW XVIII (1920) no. 29, p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ *Karma* denotes the almost general Hindu belief that our deeds have their good or bad effect attached to them and accordingly one is reborn higher or lower, and it was supposed to be an inexorable law.

Elizabeth Sharpe: "... if such was the implication of the law of *karma*, I should become a rebel against it ... The spirituality of India is made of sterner stuff than you imagine it is".¹⁰¹ Again, this was an appeal to reason and not to scriptures or their partisan interpretation. Whenever he found an interpretation that was not in conformity with reason, he dubbed it an interpolation. Hence, reporting a conversation he had with a certain *śāstri* (one well-versed in sacred lore and Hindu laws), he writes:

*At the very beginning of our talk, Maharajshri told me that, in the interpretation of śāstra, reason had no scope. That itself pained me. In my view, that which reason cannot understand and which the heart does not accept can be no śāstra.*¹⁰²

He had to face much opposition in his work for the untouchables, so that they could discover their self-respect. In spite of opposition from some of the higher castes and learned men who quoted *śāstras* (sacred laws from antiquity or as derived from sacred lore; various interpretations by ancient authorities) in their favour, he held steadily to his task of abolishing all untouchability as being below human dignity. Thus a *swāmiji*¹⁰³ had challenged him to prove from the *śāstras* that untouchability is a sin as Gandhi had claimed it to be. Gandhi makes a spirited reply and he enunciates a principle: "Every religious principle claiming authority from the *śāstras* should be tested on the anvil of truth with the hammer of compassion. If it is found hard enough and does not break, it should be accepted as correct, else we should say 'not this, not this' to a thousand experts in the *śāstras*".¹⁰⁴ In this he remained firm and would not yield. He would consider it as irreligious to consider some as untouchables: "It is not religion but rather its op-

101 CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 331, p. 422.

102 Navajivan, December 12, 1920, in CW XIX (1920-1921) no. 66, p. 97; CW XIX (1920-1921) no. 163, p. 328; cf. also CW XXVI (1925) no. 133, p. 225-226; CW XXVI (1925) no. 158, p. 265; CW XXVI (1925) no. 168, p. 291; CW XXVI (1925) no. 175, p. 318; CW XXXI (1926) no. 170, p. 158.

103 *Swāmiji*: a class of pious renunciants holding the position of religious teacher.

104 Navajivan, June 29, 1924, in CW XXIV (1924) no 167, p. 320; cf. also CW XX (1921) no. 151, p. 319-320. There are ample references on this score. Replying to a teacher: "... Take Manusmṛti [laws of Manu] only, for example, I do not know which of its verses are genuine and which are interpolations. But there are quite a few which cannot be defended as religious in their import. We must reject such verses". CW XXXI (1926) no. 170, p. 158 (parenthesis is mine).

posite to regard the out-castes as untouchables by birth".¹⁰⁵ It was an intolerable situation that people should think of themselves as higher or lower in relation to others: "God alone is high and we are all low".¹⁰⁶ Replying to someone who had written that they, the low castes, could not be lifted up because they are too degraded, he reacted:

*What though a man drinks, kills cows and eats carrion? He is no doubt an evil doer, though no greater than the one who commits secret and more deadly sins. But he is not to be treated as an untouchable even as society does not treat the secret sinner as one ... We daily create, harbour and nourish millions of untouchable thoughts. Let us shed them, for they are the true untouchables deserving to be hated and cast out.*¹⁰⁷

Gandhi did not hesitate to declare often: "I have often said that if I am born again, I wish to be born an *Antyāja*".¹⁰⁸

His solution for alleviating the sufferings of the poor was to find some simple work for them. He opposed strongly the common habit among many who indulged in feeding the poor, because in his eyes, this made them lazy and lose self-respect and human dignity. He gives his own policy: "I do not wish to open free kitchens in India; on the contrary, I want to close them. I look upon free kitchens as black blots on our face. Hence I wish to make everyone self-reliant".¹⁰⁹ Reflecting on the situation around, he writes: "The hungry millions ask for ... food. they cannot be given it. They must earn it".¹¹⁰ It was this that made him revive the simple spinning wheel so that the poor could earn something by their own labour. He would encourage others to buy their produce and use them. Here again he used the concept of 'bread-labour' a concept that comes (as he says) from the Russian

¹⁰⁵ At a public meeting at Godhra on January 2, 1925, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 408, p. 535.

¹⁰⁶ *Navajivan*, February 2, 1922, in CW XXII (1921-1922) no. 138, p. 335.

¹⁰⁷ *Young India*, May 1, 1926, in CW XXX (1926) no. 526, p. 439.

¹⁰⁸ *Antyāja*, one of the so-called low castes in West India; CW XXVI (1925) no. 64, p. 146.

¹⁰⁹ *Navajivan*, September 7, 1924, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 39, p. 61; CW XX (1921) no. 238, p. 471; no. 222, p. 444-445.

¹¹⁰ *Young India*, October 6, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 126, p. 291.

writer T.M. Bondaref and popularized by Tolstoy and Ruskin.¹¹¹ He connected it also with the *Gītā* which recommended *yajña* (sacrifice) and this he takes to mean: the *yajña* of physical/manual labour which must precede eating and not as was formerly understood by this word to mean animal or other types of sacrifice of material things. Writing to the *āśram* women, he admonishes them: "Do not forget that spinning is *yajña*. *Gītā* says that he who eats food without offering *yajña* eats stolen food. '*Yajña*' means work done for the good of others. For us spinning is such public work".¹¹² To give example to others, Gandhi took a vow of not taking any food without first working for at least half an hour at the spinning wheel. For him then, manual labour was something that ennobles man. He was also adamant when foreign clothes were burnt and the suggestion was made that these could be given to the poor instead. He said that we are demeaning the poor by giving them what we find is not fit for us. Far better to give them new clothes than such discards, so that they learn to have self-respect and still better make them self-reliant by giving them a spinning wheel and teaching them to spin.¹¹³

In his dealings with others, he had great respect for the individual's freedom. Even with his sons, he would, after pleading with them, say that they may do what they liked since they were free. He asked them only to consider him as their good friend. Similarly he treated his fellow workers, never forcing any one. Hence, writing to one of them who had begun to regret for having given up his lucrative job on Gandhi's recommendation, he says that he should do what he likes and not feel bound by Gandhi: "You will sink low if you treat my advice as an order and believe that you must not de-

¹¹¹ He mentions this in a letter to Narandas Gandhi around September 14, 1930. He wrote this letter from Yeravda prison and directed Narandas Gandhi to read it during the Tuesday prayer session at the *āśram* during morning prayers: "The law, that to live man must work, first came home to me upon reading Tolstoy's writings on bread labour. But even before that I had begun to pay homage to it after reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last* ... The divine law that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands was first stressed, not by Tolstoy but by an obscure Russian writer named T.M. Bondaref. Tolstoy took it from him and gave it wider publicity when he accepted it". CW XLIV (1930) no. 213, p. 149.

¹¹² CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 212, p. 505.

¹¹³ Cf. *Navajivan*, September 9, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 222, p. 444-445.

part from it even so little".¹¹⁴ He began to dislike much the traditional greetings to holy men by touching their feet, which was accorded to him. This appeared to him, to be a kind of slavery and attachment to one man. He said that we have had enough of slavery and there need not be another kind of slavery: "You are not truly free if you give up slavery of the British only to become my slaves. I wish to win over you mind and heart; I do not wish to make slaves of you, since I do not wish to become a slave myself".¹¹⁵ Similarly, he would advise those who were active in the Non-Cooperation Movement that they should not force others to follow them. He considered all such use of force to be against God Himself: "If however, we enlist under our banner men by force, we should be denying our cause and God".¹¹⁶

IV. Means of prosecuting this search

Here we try to classify this search under two main headings: A. Life of Prayer, and B. Life of Simplicity, Dedication and Service; but evidently these would include many other connected matters.

A. Life of prayer as means in the search for God-Truth

Compared to the previous stage, during this stage when his activities in India took a different shape and he became very busy, his life of prayer grew apace. He felt the need for prayer in his moments of trial and when he had to take decisions, which were moments of seeking the Truth. During this time, many wrote to him on spiritual matters also, asking his advice and confiding to him their secrets. He answered them not only with answers from Reason but also from his own experience. For he considered himself to be making constant experiments with Truth. Thus to a medical student who had written to him that for an educated man, worshipping God is unnatural, he replies with many reasons, in the course of which he says: "A man may live without eating for days on end, he does not live without worship for a single minute. He may not acknowledge the fact as many an

¹¹⁴ CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 187, p. 272-273.

¹¹⁵ CW XVIII (1920) no 229, p. 411; cf. also CW XXI (1921) no. 32, p. 73.

¹¹⁶ CW XXI (1921) no. 153, p. 353.

ignorant man may not acknowledge the possession of lungs or the fact of circulation of blood".¹¹⁷ Writing to the women of his Sabarmati *āśram* during his travels, he says: "It is exactly 6:50, your time of prayers. You may miss everything else but not this".¹¹⁸

Of the prayer forms that attracted him most, was the continuous repetition of God's name. It is an ancient practice, still in vogue among many a devout Hindu. He had learnt the '*Rāmanāma*'¹¹⁹ prayer as a child and had overcome his fear of ghosts and now he prescribed the same medicine for others who were troubled and anxious.¹²⁰ He gives it also as a means of preserving celibacy, for obtaining concentration of mind and inward peace.¹²¹

During his internment in prison, he had learnt the value of silence and made it his life long practice to observe every Monday as a day of silence. He calls silent prayer as one of his two trusty companions: "... constant endeavour and silent prayer always my two trusty companions along the weary but beautiful path that all seekers must tread".¹²² He similarly recommended this silent prayer or meditation in order to realize their oneness and harmony with all creatures. Accordingly, in the **Discourses on Gītā** no. 81, delivered on June 15, 1926, he recommends: "You should cultivate such a state of mind that for half an hour you will have only one thought in your mind and no other. Everyone should set apart some time in this manner for reflection. It provides an opportunity to feel one with all living crea-

¹¹⁷ **Young India**, July 8, 1926, in **CW XXXI** (1926) no. 116, p. 102.

¹¹⁸ **CW XXXII** (1926-1927) no. 147, p. 429.

¹¹⁹ Repetition of the name of *Rāmā* continuously.

¹²⁰ Writing a letter to one D.R. Majli on March 23, 1924, in **CW XXIII** (1922-1924) no. 207, p. 303; also cf. **Young India**, January 22, 1925, in **CW XXVI** (1925) no. 10, p. 28.

¹²¹ There are very many references. Some are: **CW XXX** (1926) no. 148, p. 140; no. 151, p. 142; no. 215, p. 197; no. 262, p. 228; no. 267, p. 231; no. 273, p. 236; no. 320, p. 266; no. 432, p. 361; no. 474, p. 396; **CW XXXI** (1926) no. 9, p. 6; no. 96, p. 83; no. 138, p. 124; no. 300, p. 276; **CW XXXII** (1926-1927) no. 33, p. 44.

N.B. I have deliberately chosen to mention these because they represent the year of his political silence while he remained at Sabarmati *āśram*, a time when he was catching up with himself.

¹²² **Young India**, June 1, 1921, in **CW XX** (1921) no. 78, p. 159.

tures".¹²³ His view seems to veer round to considering this seeking for Truth as an activity of self-realization, a notion very dear to Indian philosophy and religion. Hence he comes to the conclusion that Truth is hidden within the heart but prevented from being recognized due to many layers of obstacles. To remove these obstacles, the heart has to make the effort but assisted by the intellect. This linkage of the intellect at the service of the heart in its search for Truth is done through the mediation of prayer, meditation and constant watchfulness. Thus writing to a certain Amulya Chandra Sen on April 24, 1926, he observes:

*I see truth every day clearer and clearer. The process through which the soul has been passing is an effort of the heart. The intellect has been hooked to its service by prayer, meditation and constant watchfulness which are essentially matters of the heart and which have been the pre-dominant factors that have contributed to the growing revelation of truth. I have never felt that whatever knowledge has been gained was imposed from without but that it has come from within. It has been an unfolding, drawing out or perhaps better still removing the hard and ugly crusts that overlay the truth that is within.*¹²⁴

Someone had sent him a cutting where he was represented as a special messenger of God and the correspondent had asked whether Gandhi claimed any special revelation from God. Gandhi replied that he had already disclaimed all attribution of miracles to him and now further he disclaimed all special revelation. He describes himself as only someone who prays and in prayer seeks God's enlightenment to discover Truth. Further, he goes on to say that others also could do likewise: "I have no special revelation of God's will. My firm belief is that He reveals Himself daily to every human being, but we shut our ears to the 'still small voice'. We shut our eyes to the Pillar of Fire in front of us".¹²⁵

It may interest us to know what the content of his prayer was. In a letter to one V.M. Tarkunde, he says that he did not ask for anything in prayer but just reflected over some verses or hymns which came to his mind at that moment and he goes on to say that his relation with God was not only

¹²³ CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 220.

¹²⁴ CW XXX (1926) no. 426, p. 357; cf. also CW XXXI (1926) no. 572, p. 528.

¹²⁵ Young India, May 25, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 63, p. 129.

at the time of prayer "but at all times".¹²⁶ Another prayer form he liked, was the singing of *bhajans*,¹²⁷ a prayer form that is quite popular in India. A correspondent had asked his advice as to how to pray, sing devotional songs and to whom to address these, since Gandhi had been constantly advising people to pray and sing devotional songs. At the conclusion of his reply which appeared in *Navajivan* on September 20, 1925, he recommends that besides praying and singing we should also serve because that is how one comes in contact with God: "Anyone can teach us to utter certain words, but who can teach us the language of the heart? ... I have advocated the way of service. God comes unsought, comes because He must and dwells in the heart of one who serves".¹²⁸ And to a medical student who had asked him how much time has to be spent in prayer, he says that it would depend on individual temperament but they are precious moments in one's life because they make us sober and humble. For those who are filled with the presence of God, even their work is prayer: "Their life is one continuous prayer of act of worship",¹²⁹ yet not all can do this and so we ought to set apart some specified time for prayer.¹³⁰ Writing to a Mohammedan friend he says: "For a God-fearing man, the whole day is prayer time. The fixed times for prayer are merely finger posts".¹³¹ Besides the presence of God in one's heart which transforms action into prayer and service for others which brings God into one's heart, labouring for others is itself a prayer. He gives his own twist to the Latin adage: "Laborare est orare", by adding 'for others'. Thus he says: "There is a Latin proverb which means to labour is to pray, i.e. when you labour for others".¹³² A medical student had asked him to note down his various reactions during his prolonged fasts. In the course of his reply describing the various stages of fasting and accompanying reactions,

¹²⁶ CW XXXI (1926) no. 589, p. 542.

¹²⁷ *Bhajans*: singing of rhythmic devotional songs with many repetitions to enable the slow sinking of the words into the heart of the devotee.

¹²⁸ CW XXVIII (1925) no. 115, p. 207-209.

¹²⁹ *Young India*, June 10, 1926, in CW XXX (1926) no. 664, p. 556-557.

¹³⁰ Letter to his secretary, Mahadev Desai, on November 7, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 150, p. 346.

¹³¹ Letter to Mahomed Ali, on May 18, 1925, in CW XXVI (1925) no. 67, p. 125.

¹³² Letter to P.S.S. Rama Iyer, on April 16, 1926, in CW XXX (1926) no. 285, p. 244.

Gandhi notes: "No matter from what motive you are fasting, during this precious time, think of your Maker, and your relation to Him and His other creation and you will make discoveries you have not even dreamed of".¹³³ Thus Gandhi employed prayer, dedication, silence, fasting, etc. in his search for God-Truth. But this was not an one-sided affair. Already we have noted how he sees that work itself could be prayer. We shall now see how he seeks God-Truth in his life of service and dedication and the different shapes such a life took for him.

B. Life of simplicity, dedication and service as means of this search

He saw clearly that service of the poor is indeed service of God. Consequently, in the course of a reply to a Parsi gentleman enquiring from Persia, how he may serve God, he asserts categorically: "He can be served in one way alone. To serve the poor is to serve God ... At each place and at each point of time service assumes a different form, although the sentiment involved in it is the same. In serving those who suffer, one serves God".¹³⁴ God's judgement of our lives would also be on the basis of this service of those who are in distress:

*Before the throne of the Almighty we shall be judged, not by what we have eaten nor by whom we have been touched but by whom we have served and how. Inasmuch as we serve a single human being in distress, we shall find favour in the sight of God.*¹³⁵

The Indian religious ideal is searching for self-realization through self-purification. Gandhi's strong contribution to this traditional thought is that it is achieved through service. Even a *sādhu* (mendicant renunciant) can do it only through service, not through selfish laziness, was Gandhi's contention. Replying to an enquirer he answers in the serial order of questions:

1. The aim of life should be self-purification. 2. The voidness of life is removed by filling it with selfless service ... 5. Selfishness can only be removed by devoted service of others without any expectation of reward ...

¹³³ *Young India*, December 17, 1925, in *CW XXIX* (1925-1926) no. 53, p. 318.

¹³⁴ *Young India*, October 25, 1925 in *CW XXVIII* (1925) no. 211, p. 384-385.

¹³⁵ *Young India*, January 1, 1922, in *CW XXII* (1921-1922) no., 62, p. 136-137.

*7. Concentration comes by devoting oneself to some single pure act of service.*¹³⁶

He did not fail to preach to the Christians also, telling them to serve all without any distinction: "You cannot serve God and refuse to serve your neighbours. But he who passes over his neighbour, be he Hindu, Christian or Musalman, denies his God".¹³⁷ In this service of others, whichever form it may take, Gandhi toiled and rejoiced. The very service was a reward. He was satisfied if in all this, God used him as an instrument: "If it is the will of God, He will use me as an instrument. He holds the thread in His hands. I am but one of the threads".¹³⁸

He was also very conscious that service meant reality, not pious platitudes. In this way, he would tell a group of Jain merchants that merely paying lip service to compassion and non-violence would not do. If they, as merchants cheated the people and donated the money for charity or promoting pious causes, it would only be a deceiving of themselves, thinking it as religion whereas it is only irreligion.¹³⁹ And religion itself was for him not a "matter for reflection but for conduct".¹⁴⁰ Similarly giving a message to his readers on the occasion of his birthday, he notes: "It is a huge waste if, from all these books which people read, nothing is put into practice. Try, therefore, to act upon at least an ounce of what you read in books rather than attempt to read a ton of them".¹⁴¹ Some had written to him asking whether someone who had taken up seriously Gandhi's programme of non-violent non-cooperation could continue using foreign sugar, foreign cloth and tea. He replied that even after someone had given up all these, if he were to be not compassionate to neighbours, family, etc., then all these self-imposed

¹³⁶ Letter to Dharendra Chandra Latiry, on August 5, 1926, in *CW XXXI* (1926) no. 285, p. 265-266.

¹³⁷ In a speech in reply to the welcome address at Kottayam Christian Centre on March 15, 1925, in *CW XXVI* (1925) no. 179, p. 316.

¹³⁸ In a letter to Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, on May 14, 1924, in *CW XXIV* (1924) no. 24, p. 41.

¹³⁹ *CW XV* (1918-1919) no. 369, p. 400.

¹⁴⁰ *CW XV* (1918-1919) no. 374, p. 411.

¹⁴¹ *CW XXI* (1921) no. 102, p. 228-229.

restrictions are useless.¹⁴² He could not be indifferent to what went on around him. Thus during the Champaran problem¹⁴³ when he was ordered to leave the district, he made a statement before the magistrate saying that after witnessing the sad state of the poor peasants and the injustices done to them, he could not go away: "If we withdrew at this stage, we would stand condemned before man and God and, what is more important of all, we would never be able to forgive ourselves".¹⁴⁴

During this stage, Gandhi learnt to identify himself with the poor more and more. He had already started the simple life in South Africa with the foundation of the Phoenix settlement and later, the Tolstoy farm. It was to be a simple agricultural set up, keeping the wants to the minimum so that the members may be self-reliant and at the same time trained to make sacrifices, which was necessary for the *satyāgraha* struggle there. In India, too, he started the Sabarmati *āśram* with a similar motive. But it was more developed in its concept and with many more practices in line with the Indian situation. Of this we shall consider a little later. Coming back to his practice of poverty, it was not a praise of poverty for its own sake. Nor would he say that it is alright to be in want for even the bare necessities of life, which reduces the dignity and self-respect of the human being. His emphasis was rather on simplicity and the avoiding of superfluities. One should look only for what is needed for here and now, without hoarding for tomorrow, nor should one multiply one's needs. In a remarkable speech at Muir College to the Economic Society, Allahabad on December 12, 1916, he quotes fully the Gospel passage Mk 10:17-31, with his own comments.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, speaking to a Christian audience at Madras, he had said that when we take something that we do not need for our immediate need, we are thieves in a way because in India there were three millions with the barest minimum and so "you and I have no right to anything that we really have until these three million are clothed and fed better. You and I, who ought to know bet-

¹⁴² *Navajivan*, March 15, 1925, in CW XXVI (1925) no. 117, p. 315.

¹⁴³ Cf. above, p. 35.

¹⁴⁴ Statement to W.B. Heycock, the District Magistrate of Motihari on May 20, 1917, in CW XIII (1915-1917) no. 313, p. 404.

¹⁴⁵ CWXIII (1915-1917) no. 226, p. 313-314.

ter, must adjust our wants".¹⁴⁶ As we have already mentioned, he had identified himself with the masses during this stage by going about without a shirt and only in a loin cloth. A Muslim correspondent asked him about it and his reply was that it was painful for him to eat or dress since the poor do not have enough of these and because he found it to be a means to have a vision (*darśan*) of God: "I know that I can have a *darśan* of God in no other way. I want to see Him face to face. I have become impatient for the experience. I shall not be blessed with the vision until I have made myself the poorest of the poor".¹⁴⁷ He would advise Congress politicians not to stand aloof from the people but go to the poorest to share their sorrows and difficulties, anticipating their wants. They should try to experience what it means to have the remains of food thrown at them by the upper classes or do the work of scavenging:

*... see how we like being in the boxes, miscalled houses of the labourers of Bombay. We must identify ourselves with the villagers who toil under the hot sun beating on their bent backs and see how we would like to drink water from the pool in which the villagers bathe, wash their clothes and pots and in which their cattle drink and roll. Then and not till then, shall we truly represent the masses and they will, as surely as I am writing this, respond to every call.*¹⁴⁸

No wonder then that the Indian masses responded to Gandhi's call. He has, here unwittingly, given the secret of his own hold over the masses! He trained his own Sabarmati *āśramites* to live and experience the life of the poor. One of the first tasks he set for those who joined his *āśram* was to do scavenging.¹⁴⁹

One of the demands made on the full members of his *āśram* was the taking and the practice of vows. We have mentioned these in the section on the historical note.¹⁵⁰ For him, the taking of such vows meant a seriousness of purpose, a genuineness, an endeavour to stay in and seek Truth. Thus he felt that these members would form the core of genuine *satyāgrahis*, needed

¹⁴⁶ Speech at Y.M.C.A., Madras on February 16, 1916, in CW XIII (1915-1917) no. 170, p. 229-230.

¹⁴⁷ *Navajivan*, July 27, 1924, in CW XXIV (1924) no. 244, p. 456.

¹⁴⁸ *Young India*, September 11, 1924, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 85, p. 121-122.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. CW XXX (1926) no. 513, p. 431.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. above, p. 34.

for the real service of the country.¹⁵¹ Among the vows, those connected with poverty deserve a mention because they appear to be somewhat special. The fifth vow was the vow of non-stealing. He explained that by this vow is meant not only stealing what is normally considered as other people's property, but also a realization that Nature provides for what is needed for each one and hence one should not take for oneself whatever is more than what one needs for that day by way of food, dress and the use of other articles. To do otherwise would be, in a way, depriving someone else of his share provided by Nature. The sixth vow was the vow of non-possession by which he meant not only not to possess much or keep much but also not to keep with oneself anything which one does not absolutely need for the nourishment and protection of the body. Accordingly, one should give up the use of all that one can do without and simplify one's life and minimize one's needs to the barest minimum.¹⁵² Speaking a few years later of the unnecessary multiplication of needs, he goes on to give a golden rule for deciding what one should or should not have: "The golden rule to apply in all such cases is resolutely to refuse to have what millions cannot".¹⁵³ Thus for him, to live a poor and simple life had a social dimension attached to it.

One may, however, ask whether all these are not impossible ideals. Indeed, one of his correspondents raised this question. He felt qualms of conscience because he was not perfect and therefore not fit for service. Gandhi writes to him to put away all such qualms of conscience. It was necessary to put in one's best effort to become perfect but to refuse to serve until one has reached such a perfection, is to cut off the very means of reaching that perfection, which is an ideal:

*We rise only by actual service and by taking the risk of making mistakes while serving. Not one of us is perfect. Not one of us is able to realize the whole of our spiritual ambition. All the same, in the humblest manner possible we have to continue to serve and hope that through that service we may some day realize that ambition. If we all refuse to serve until we attain perfection, there will be no service. The fact is that perfection is attained through service.*¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Cf. CW XIII (1915-1917) no. 210, p. 290-291.

¹⁵² Cf. CW XIII (1915-1917) no. 85, p. 92; CW XIII (1915-1917) no. 170, p. 229-230.

¹⁵³ *Young India*, June 24, 1926, in CW XXXI (1926) no. 58, p. 44-45.

¹⁵⁴ Letter to K. Santanam, in CW XXX (1926) no. 512, p. 430.

Gandhi sought ways and means of concretizing this seeking for Truth in services which are tangible. One such service which occupied his mind, especially from the time of Non-Cooperation Movement, was the Spinning Wheel Movement. It was a reflection born of the situations he had observed. Its effects were far reaching and he saw in it more than what meets the eye. It is a gross misunderstanding to look at it only as an economic means though Gandhi did speak of it in that fashion. He gives a picture of how so much cotton was exported to England to be transformed into mill cloth at Lancashire and sold back in India, where, in times long past, fine muslin cloth was manufactured and had been sold in Europe. But the East India Company had cleverly destroyed this home industry in order to find employment for its own people at home, and a lucrative market in India. He wanted to break this situation of injustice and exploitation. Hence he started the movement for burning foreign manufactured cloth and at the same time promoting indigenously manufactured home-spun cloth. There were at this time a number of Indian cloth mills with foreign machinery, turning out a limited amount of cloth. But he saw in these mills a deprivation of work for millions of people. The Indian farmer was wasting much time for nearly six months of the year when no cultivation was possible during the dry season. He felt that the revival of the spinning wheel would mean an opportunity for earning a few more coppers as an additional income. Here was something concrete in the way of alleviating the poverty of the land, a means of gaining self-respect rather than merely extending the hand for doles. It was for him "the eradication of the poverty of India and the freedom for every man and woman".¹⁵⁵ He transformed this Spinning Wheel Movement into a mass movement. The spinning wheel itself had been until then forgotten, hardly anyone even knew of it but he revived it in a short time, encouraging the invention of a simpler and more efficient instrument. Today once again, it has lost its popularity and importance. The mills have taken its place, though it survives through Government support but on a very low key.

At this stage which we are considering, Gandhi had begun to preach the spinning wheel with religious fervour. Though one may or may not agree with the arguments adduced by him on the ground of economic feasibility, relevance or even utility, the complex motives that went into his Spin-

¹⁵⁵ *Navajivan* (Hindi), May 4, 1924, in CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 392, p. 538.

ning Wheel (or *charkā* as it was called) Movement, or *Khādi* (home-spun cloth) Movement, are worth noting. For him it meant an identification with the poor and thus discovering God. Thus in a letter from prison on April 14, 1922, he says that the four hours he spent at the spinning wheel were precious hours for him because during that time he had concentration of mind which was not there even when he read the *Gītā* or *Rāmāyana* and the fruits of the labour was there right in front of him. Consequently, for him, it seemed to be a means of "daily coming nearer to the poorest of the poor and to that extent to God".¹⁵⁶ Later, when a correspondent had pointed out that Brahmin fellow workers of Gandhi like Vinoba Bhave and Balkoba were wasting time plying the spinning wheel, instead of using their intelligence for something more worthy, he defended them by saying that mere knowledge was useless unless it is made practical and these two had come closer to God: "Vinoba and Balkoba are better Brahmins for having become spinners and weavers and scavengers. Their knowledge is more digested. A Brahmin is one who knows God. Both these fellow-workers are nearer God today by reason of their having felt for and identified themselves through spinning with the starving millions of India".¹⁵⁷

He insisted on everyone plying the wheel for half an hour daily,¹⁵⁸ which became compulsory for the congress members who had to wear the home-spun (*khādi*) cloth and at one time it even became a mode of subscription for the active members to give a specified quantity of spun thread. It was the means of uniting the rich and poor in the land.¹⁵⁹ He also saw how such a movement could develop other virtues such as simplicity, sincerity and regularity since it meant a daily task. Some of his correspondents also mentioned how the time spent at the wheel quietened them.¹⁶⁰ But there were others who said that the rosary¹⁶¹ was better than the spinning wheel and to

¹⁵⁶ Letter to Ajmal Khan, April 14, 1922, in CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 62, p. 134.

¹⁵⁷ *Young India*, July 17, 1924, in CW XXIV (1924) no. 210, p. 401-402.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Navajivan*, January 11, 1925, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 409, p. 536.

¹⁵⁹ *Navajivan*, January 18, 1925, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 422, p. 549-550; also cf. *Bombay Chronicles*, March 27, 1925, in CW XXVI (1925) no. 231, p. 420.

¹⁶⁰ *Navajivan*, January 25, 1925, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 440, p. 602-603.

¹⁶¹ Both the Hindus and Muslims use types of rosaries in the repetitive recitations of God's names or His attributes.

this Gandhi replied by saying that spinning was both a penance and prayer that is concrete, because while spinning, one is working for the poor and with the poor who are suffering on account of our negligence and exploitation and through our identification with them we see God: "They are living the cattle-life today and we are responsible for it. The spinning wheel is, therefore, a penance for us. Religion is service of the helpless and the stricken. But we in spite of our forehead marks, take no notice of them, i.e. of God".¹⁶² He would continue telling the people constantly: "Spin in the name of God and spin for the poor of your land".¹⁶³ He would tell both congressmen and others who followed his lead that example is better than speaking or reading. It would be better if they worked the spinning wheel and wore *khādi* which the poor can see and thus understand the message: "What matters it even if newspapers are closed down? The common class of people do not read newspapers. They certainly read you and me".¹⁶⁴ However, to the foreigners, his interpretation of the spinning wheel would be to tell them that it is to substitute exploitation by service. Thus in an interview to a certain Katherine Mayo of the U.S.A. on March 17, 1926, he observes:

*The message of the spinning wheel is, really, to replace the spirit of exploitation by the spirit of service. The dominant note in the West is the note of exploitation ... What is now done is a bargain destructive to both sides. For exploitation is as bad for the one as for the other.*¹⁶⁵

One result of the movement was the appearance of the famous 'Gandhi cap', a white, home-spun cloth cap which came to be looked upon by the British as a symbol of revolt and some of those who wore these caps were dismissed from Government posts and some of the English firms followed suit. At this point, the spinning wheel became a symbol in more than one sense. Gandhi persevered in it in spite of all and varying objections which came from different quarters.

¹⁶² *Young India*, August 14, 1924, in *CW XXIV* (1924) no. 298, p. 547.

¹⁶³ *Young India*, December 1925, in *CW XXIX* (1925-1926) no. 35, p. 301.

¹⁶⁴ *Navajivan*, August 3, 1924, reporting an address to the National Education Conference at Ahmedabad, in *CW XXIV* (1924) no. 268, p. 496.

¹⁶⁵ *CW XXX* (1926) no. 134, p. 119-120.

We have already noted that the dignity of human beings is a basis of his love for fellowmen. Therefore it now remains for us to mention here that his love for the untouchables was very concrete. He would want that:

*... we must not only mechanically touch them; we must serve them. We must eat after we have found food for them, that is, found the means of procuring their livelihood; if they are starving. We must drink after we have given them to drink, if they are thirsty. If one is suffering from fever or bitten by a snake, I would kiss that wound just as I would if my son were bitten by a snake.*¹⁶⁶

He would hold out against all the arguments brought forward by the orthodox Hindus. Though he advocated the ending of untouchability and the still more odious 'invisibility',¹⁶⁷ he did not advocate inter-dining which for him was, at this stage, meaningless since he considered dining as not communal but rather, a private animal function. Still less would he, at this stage, recommend inter-marriage of the so-called low castes and higher castes.

Other areas of his service and concern was his fight against the drink evil. He encouraged non-violent picketing of the pubs. For him this was another instance of the callousness of the Government which stood to gain by the huge revenues from the sale of liquor and he felt degraded that the Government justified it by saying that the revenues so obtained were for the education department. He opposed also the evil of child marriage and advocated the raising of marriageable age. He also campaigned for the widows' remarriage, especially those who were child widows. To him it was nothing short of gross injustice done to these by the society.

Finally, for him the love of one's country was equal to the love of mankind. Thus commenting on the death of a patriot C.R. Das, he said: "Love of one's country is not opposed to love of mankind, but it is a concrete instance of it. It ultimately lifts one to the highest peak of universal love".¹⁶⁸ He loved too, his Hindu religion. Writing to the *The Survey*, a paper in the U.S.A. on December 1, 1925, which had asked him why he remained a Hindu when Hinduism tolerated such evils as the caste system (which

¹⁶⁶ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 14, 1922, in CW XXII (1921-1922) no. 52, p. 118.

¹⁶⁷ In some parts of the country at that time, even the sight of the suppressed classes was supposed to pollute the orthodox and they had to keep out of their sight. It is this that Gandhi called 'invisibility'.

¹⁶⁸ CW XXVII (1925) no. 190, p. 304.

Gandhi had accepted as a useful socio-economic system), he defends himself by saying that while the Hindu system upholds the caste system, it does not accept untouchability. It was, he says elsewhere, only an interpolation of the Scriptures. He concludes by saying: "After having studied Christianity, Islam and other great faiths of the world, I have found in Hinduism my greatest comfort. I have not found any to be perfect. I have discovered superstition and error in the practice of all these faiths".¹⁶⁹ For him all religions were only relatively true while the Truth he was seeking was far above all these and is to be sought concretely in the face of the poor and the oppressed with whom he would identify himself.

V. *Satyāgraha*, *ahimsā* and allied concepts during this stage

With his South African experience in the background, he developed further his concepts of *satyāgraha* and *ahimsā*, taking into account the Indian situation and the events and consequent problems that cropped up. Other connected concepts also took shape during this stage.

It is often thought to be a virtue to work for the underdog but for Gandhi it was not a condescending act. It was for him a call to duty, to truth, to *satya*. Thus we see him, at first reluctant in early 1917 to take up the question of the peasants of Champaran but once he had seen the situation and witnessed the grave injustice, he could not keep silent and accomplished the task of setting right the situation and ending the injustice. In the same year, he again intervened in the case of the textile workers of Ahmedabad when he found that their cause was just and later in the year he took up the Kheda land tax agitation. So in each case it was the *satya* of the concrete situation that moved him to respond. It was a commitment to Truth. The year 1926 was far different. Much had changed. To some of his friends he too seemed to have shifted his position. One of his friends, the textile industrialist Ambalal Sarabai had remarked that Gandhi had changed. He accepts that in a way he has changed. The obvious reference seems to be that his commitment to Truth has not changed though the modalities of the actions towards Truth have changed and this was due to the changed circumstances:

¹⁶⁹ *The Hindu*, January 19, 1926, in CW XXIX (1925-1926) no. 22, p. 292.

*You have not changed; if anyone, I have changed, though I think I too have not. How could all that was in me come out at one time, without the circumstances to draw it out? Circumstances made me a non-cooperator. To others, that may appear as a change in me. But so far as I am concerned, I was being true to myself and, therefore, my non-cooperation was but a manifestation of my real self in relation to particular circumstances ... The truth is that I have not changed at all. I merely responded in the appropriate manner to the changed circumstances.*¹⁷⁰

In his own personal life and in his various movements it had to be Truth that is supreme and powerful. Hence, basic to *satyāgraha* is the stance one takes for *Satya* (Truth). The dynamics of *satyāgraha* is first of all to ascertain the situation. Is there a situation of injustice? Once one finds it so, then one takes the side of justice which is Truth and the commitment of the *satyāgrahi* for Truth enables him to stand by it even unto death. What really happens is: Truth begins to work out and victory follows. If victory does not come about, then the cause would be that the *satyāgrahi* had not been firm in his *satya* or he himself may be practising duplicity and being unjust in his dealings, which is but unfaithfulness to *Satya*. In this way, he tells the farmers engaged in the Kheda *satyāgraha* that they had not succeeded in their movement because they had been withholding the customary share of the Dhed community (so-called untouchables) for the past four years.¹⁷¹ In the bigger movements he later organized, he seems to follow the same thinking. Thus in the Khilafat Movement he declares to a correspondent that if the British have done wrong it will recoil upon them, we need not do anything violently to them, which being an evil would only increase evil:

*If they have meant ill, by the infallible law of causation it must react upon them and therefore it must go ill with them and not with us ... It is only because in the vast majority of cases we meet evil by evil that it continues to grow like weeds. Resist not evil is the law of our being.*¹⁷²

Therefore he wished that anyone who engaged himself in *satyāgraha* should stand by Truth in his life. It meant also that he is firm or persistent in Truth for that is the meaning of the component *āgraha* in the word *satyāgraha*. So when the mill workers were wavering in their resolution and were about to give up, he undertook a fast. He claimed that it was not to force

¹⁷⁰ Letter to Ambalal Sarabai, July 11, 1926, in CW XXXI (1926) no. 140, p. 125.

¹⁷¹ Speech to the villagers of Sandesar on May 16, 1918, in CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 276, p. 399.

¹⁷² Letter to Shuaib Qureshi on September 24, 1918, in CW XV (1918-1919) no. 59, p. 51-52.

the hands of mill owners which would have been a form of violence but as an act of self-purification and to obtain a strength in solidarity with the workers so that they may persevere in their resolution, i.e. in their *āgraha* for *Satya*.¹⁷³ Similarly, in the Kheda *satyāgraha*, he reminded the people that they must remain true to the pledge they had taken in the name of God-Truth, in spite of all the sufferings they had to undergo.¹⁷⁴ This was not an easy task even during the Non-Cooperation Movement. He realized that often enough, the participants lacked self-confidence, which lack was, for him, a weakness and not a firm commitment to Truth: "Non-cooperation is therefore, as much a protest against our own weakness, as against the inherent corruption of the existing system".¹⁷⁵

He expected the *satyāgrahis* to give up all hatred because that was contrary to Truth. The goal of *satyāgraha* is, after all, the triumph of Truth, not the triumph of individuals over individuals or even group over group. Hence he could not tolerate any hatred of the English. So when he heard that some Englishmen were violently attacked, he reacted strongly and said that in that case he would have to offer *satyāgraha* against the so-called *satyāgrahis* because by hating and violently attacking the English, these so-called or pseudo-*satyāgrahis* would remain not the votaries of Truth but aggressors and oppressors of others. In this manner, the *satyāgrahi* would have moved from Truth to untruth.¹⁷⁶ He would not want the *satyāgrahi* to feel hurt or exhibit anger against the English Government. For to be angry with the wrongdoer and take up arms to fight, is the doctrine of violence whereas those who believed in God and His righteousness, i.e. in Truth, would, while disobeying the wrongdoer, not be angry with him. To give up anger is not a virtue to be practised only by the *śamnyāsin*.¹⁷⁷ When the burning of foreign clothes was undertaken he was asked whether this would not result in people hating the foreigners, he categorically asserted that "we should learn

¹⁷³ Cf. letter to the editor of *The Leader*, April 17, 1918, in *CW XIV* (1917-1918) no. 194, p. 285-286.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. speech at Chikoda on April 17, 1918, in *CW XIV* (1918-1919) no. 240, p. 357.

¹⁷⁵ *Young India*, June 8, 1921, in *CW XX* (1921) no. 89, p. 185-186.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Satyagraha Leaflet*, no. 3, April 4, 1919, in *CW XV* (1918-1919) no. 201, p. 212.

¹⁷⁷ At a meeting in Nagapatnam on March 29, 1919, in *CW XV* (1918-1919) no. 158, p. 164.

to condemn evil but, at the same time, love the evil doer".¹⁷⁸ and when he received an abusive letter against an editor, he reacted: "... a non-cooperator, should improve his language, purify his thought and make them gentler".¹⁷⁹ To an audience, probably consisting of many Europeans at the Meccano Club in Calcutta on August 25, 1925, he explains: "Non-cooperation or *satyāgraha*, therefore is not a hymn of hate ... Real non-cooperation is non-cooperation with evil and not with the evil doer".¹⁸⁰ Similarly, he explains on July 28, 1925, in a letter to a 15-year old boy from Kansas, U.S.A., who had asked him whether he hated the British:

*You seem to have taken for granted that I hate the British. What makes you think so? I have hundreds of friends among the British people. I cannot love the Musselmans and for that matter the Hindus if I hate the British. My love is not an exclusive affair. If I hate the British today, I would have to hate the Mohammedans tomorrow and the Hindus the day after.*¹⁸¹

He conceives the whole Non-Cooperation Movement as an operation designed to bring the wrongdoer to better understanding. Indeed, it was an ancient practice, somewhat like the Medieval European Church which excluded some and declared them to be 'excommunicatus vitandus'. A similar practice is in vogue even today in some Indian villages where the evil-doers are put out of society. But what Gandhi stressed was not only absence of hatred but presence of positive love: "Non-cooperation without love is satanic; non-cooperation with love is godly ... our non-cooperation also springs from love. Without it, everything is hollow. Love is not merely the master key, it is the only key ...".¹⁸² And he had said earlier to his readers, counselling them: "If you want to free India through your strength shower love on others".¹⁸³ Comparing hatred and love he says that hatred only tends to kill while love ever dies for others and what is obtained by hatred does not

¹⁷⁸ Navajivan, July 17, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 189, p. 381-382.

¹⁷⁹ Navajivan, July 17, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 191, p. 393.

¹⁸⁰ The Forward, August 28, 1925, in CW XXVIII (1925) no. 70, p. 128.

¹⁸¹ CW XXVII (1925) no. 274, p. 433.

¹⁸² Navajivan, December 4, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 222, p. 519-520.

¹⁸³ Navajivan, November 11, 1921, in CW XXI (1921) no. 212, p. 491.

last long, it becomes a burden and increases hatred. Violent non-cooperation only multiplies evil than reduce it.¹⁸⁴

He further explains the meaning of *satyāgraha* by saying that genuine *satyāgraha* cannot be had when both parties are *satyāgrahis*. For then, there is no possibility to have a test of love. It presupposes that one of the parties is practising injustice and the other is trying to convert him through love and self-suffering. It also presupposes that *satyāgraha* ceases as soon as the injustice is removed, for then Truth prevails and is restored.¹⁸⁵ Here we must observe the logic of non-violent non-cooperation which for Gandhi works like a scientific law: "... good evokes good, evil —evil; and that therefore, if evil does not receive the corresponding response, it ceases to act, dies of want of nutrition ... the law underlying it acts with scientific precision".¹⁸⁶ When a certain foreigner Mr. Arthur L. Weatherby had in an article tried to show that non-cooperation is also a form of violence, Gandhi defended himself by saying that a certain amount of suffering caused to the wrongdoer is inevitable but the motive of the non-cooperation is not to cause pain but to convert the wrongdoer: "It will be an act of love when non-cooperation is resorted to solely for the good of the wrongdoer".¹⁸⁷ Rather, he would consider that suffering accrues to the *satyāgrahi* and his hope in the movement is that such a suffering would open the eyes of the oppressor. Thus at Vykam, Kerala, the so-called untouchables had been forbidden by caste Hindus and the Native Government to walk along a street leading to a temple and the *satyāgrahis*, trying to get this disability removed through *satyāgraha*, had suffered much and Gandhi encouraged them by writing to them:

Our business is to show them that they are wrong and we should do so by our suffering. I have found that mere appeal to reason does not answer where prejudices are age-long and based on supposed religious authority.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. *Satyagraha Leaflet*, no. 20, May 10, 1919, in *CW XV* (1918-1919) no. 272, p. 299; also cf. *Young India*, March 23, 1922, in *CW XXIII* (1922-1924) no. 57, p. 118-119.

¹⁸⁵ *Satyagraha Leaflet*, no. 14, May 4, 1919, in *CW XV* (1918-1919) no. 250, p. 271.

¹⁸⁶ *Young India*, May 15, 1924, in *CW XXIV* (1924) no. 28, p. 55; cf. also letter to G.D. Birla, May 20, 1924, in *CW XXIV* (1924) no. 46, p. 87.

¹⁸⁷ *Young India*, April 10, 1924, in *CW XXIII* (1922-1924) no. 317, p. 407.

*Reason has to be strengthened by suffering and suffering opens the eyes of understanding.*¹⁸⁸

When he came out of prison in 1924, the big problem that he confronted was the division in the Congress camp where some wanted to partially cooperate with the Government and had founded the Swaraj party to enter elected councils. Gandhi counselled the non-cooperators not to be angry with others or condemn them but rather practise a form of friendly non-cooperation: "The path of love is like a flame of fire; many have run away on gazing at it. Those who wish to run away, may do so. However, those who will bear with that flame will triumph".¹⁸⁹

During the early part of the Non-Cooperation Movement, some tended to confuse it with boycott. Gandhi makes a distinction between the two. While boycott was positively causing hurt to the wrongdoer and a trying to injure him, non-cooperation was in a way negative. Non-cooperation withdraws its cooperation from the wrongdoing of the wrongdoer and thus even if only one were to be non-cooperating, to that extent is evil not continued. Accordingly, it is at least to that level effective and successful and positively achieves something. On the other hand, boycott is wasted energy: "... boycott by half a dozen persons is like hitting an elephant with a straw".¹⁹⁰

A certain missionary G. Gillespie tried another angle in his persuasion with Gandhi. He had written to Gandhi asking him to cooperate with lawful authority since that is what Jesus Christ did, Gandhi replied after giving several examples from Hindu Scriptures to show that non-cooperation with evil is valid:

*I can write of the Bible only with diffidence. But reading it has clearly confirmed the opinion derived from the reading of Hindu Scriptures. Jesus mixed with the Publicans and the sinners neither as a dependent nor as a patron ... would Jesus have accepted gifts from the money changers, taken from them scholarships for his friends, and advanced loans to them to ply their nefarious traffic?*¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ *Young India*, March 19, 1925, in *CW XXVI* (1925) no. 159, p. 271.

¹⁸⁹ *CW XXV* (1924-1925) no. 301, p. 345-346; cf. also *CW XXV* (1924-1925) no. 218, p. 259.

¹⁹⁰ Reply to Mr. Zahoar Ahmed in *Young India*, January 14, 1920, in *CW XVI* (1919-1920) no. 254, p. 481.

¹⁹¹ *Young India*, January 19, 1921, in *CW XIX* (1920-1921) no. 124, p. 245.

Finally, *satyāgraha* is again such an ideal that it is difficult to find a genuine *satyāgrahi* who could be called a perfect one. He would have felt that just as Truth itself was a distant ideal towards which we keep going and all we reach on earth are partial truths, a perfect or total *satyāgrahi* is an ideal person. If such a one were found, even one would be enough. Writing to his friend and supporter G.A. Natesan on June 25, 1919, he remarks:

*Remember what I have often said, one real satyāgrahi is enough for victory. This is becoming clear to me day by day. Even as a true coin fetches full value, so does a true satyāgrahi fetch full value, i.e. attain the intended result.*¹⁹²

Now we turn to *ahimsā*, an essential component of *satyāgraha*. At this stage, he develops many nuances in its understanding. The many situations he faced, the questions he was asked, made him reflect further about it. Thus while replying to a nationalist leader Lala Lajpat Rai in October 1916, he notes: "In its positive form, *ahimsā* means the largest love, the greatest charity ... I must love my enemy".¹⁹³ He further calls it Truth-force and Love-force since true conduct is impossible without love and harbouring of any ill will is an offence against truth. Here the underlying thought for him is the truth that we are all one in the one reality or *sat*.¹⁹⁴ He had also called it as 'soul-force' to distinguish it from violence which is brute-force. As soul-force, it is love-force: "If I could popularize the use of soul-force which is but another name for love-force, in the place of brute-force, I know that I could present you with an India that could defy the whole world to do its worst".¹⁹⁵ Finally, he finds that the best English word for it would be the word 'innocence' (since, positively it seems to connote pure love, simplicity, purity of intention, trust in others' good will; negatively an absence of hatred, duplicity and intent to hurt and destroy others?): "No other English term can express all the meanings of *ahimsā* which the word 'innocence' expresses. Hence *ahimsā* and 'innocence' may be regarded as equiva-

¹⁹² CW XV (1918-1919) no. 354, p. 389.

¹⁹³ The Modern Review, October 1916, in CW XIII (1915-1917) no. 216, p. 295.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Satyagraha Leaflet no. 6, April 25, 1919, in CW XV (1918-1919) no. 231, p. 248-249.

¹⁹⁵ Letter to Viceroy, April 29, 1918, in CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 255, p. 379.

lents".¹⁹⁶ However, he never accepted to write a treatise on *ahimsā* though many kept asking him till the end and his own answer was that he was experimenting and since it is an ideal, it can never be fully described by anybody. It could only be discovered by experience as one goes along. Thus, for example, he was asked whether it would not be violence to call someone a hypocrite, thus causing him hurt? His reply was that if someone were really a hypocrite, it would be no violence to politely tell him so. On the contrary, not to do so would be violence because it would be against Truth and we would be assisting falsehood.¹⁹⁷

Explaining the Sabarmati Asramites' vow of *ahimsā* to an audience in early 1916, he describes it as an attitude of mind which demands that no uncharitable thoughts against others be entertained even against the so-called enemies. Indeed, for those who follow *ahimsā*, there are no enemies. That is why he says 'so-called enemies'. But some may consider themselves as enemies of the votary of *ahimsā*, for which, of course, one is not responsible. He goes on to say that the votary of *ahimsā* will not resent the harm caused by others and explains what he means by this resentment. It would include even wishing the destruction of others by other causes.¹⁹⁸ Thus, anyone who follows *ahimsā* as the rule of his life, will not give in to anger but would rather burn his anger and not judge others.¹⁹⁹ True "non-violence means reliance on God the Rock of ages".²⁰⁰ Any violence or killing of the tyrant would tempt us also to become one day tyrants in our turn because such persons have unconsciously usurped God's place and it is untruth and can only lead us to destruction.²⁰¹

In the heyday of Hindu-Muslim unity during the Khilafat Movement, he devised means of preserving communal harmony and one such was the suggestion of taking a pledge. The pledge declares that both parties would

¹⁹⁶ Speech to the inmates of Shantiniketan, Tagore's *āśram* school on September 17, 1920, in *CW XVIII* (1920) no. 150, p. 265.

¹⁹⁷ Letter to Lalan Pandit on November 15, 1926, in *CW XXXII* (1926-1927) no. 37, p. 46-47.

¹⁹⁸ Speech at Y.M.C.A., Madras, February 16, 1916, in *CW XIII* (1915-1917) no. 170, p. 228.

¹⁹⁹ *CW XXI* (1921) no. 187, p. 432-433.

²⁰⁰ *CW XIX* (1920-1921) no. 114, p. 220.

²⁰¹ Cf. *Navajivan*, January 16, 1922, in *CW XXII* (1921-1922) no. 82, p. 202.

share the sorrows of each other, respect the religion and religious feelings of each other and always refrain from violence in the name of religion.²⁰² Hence, religious tolerance was for him a normal consequence of practising *ahimsā*. In 1924, when he had come out of prison, he had faced a split in the party with some who wanted to cooperate partially with the Government. Though he did not like it and it pained him intensely, he remained true to *ahimsā* and yielded to them and did not wish their destruction: "I wish to learn, and act upon, the *mantra*²⁰³ of dying to live. I should like to live only through the world's love".²⁰⁴ He would advise those who followed his lead to do likewise towards the rebels: "We may be strict with ourselves, but should be correspondingly liberal in our attitude to others. That is the way of non-violence".²⁰⁵

To practise *ahimsā* was, for him, to be human. He accepted the Darwinian theory of evolution, as indeed it is easy for any Hindu to do. But for him, to be born a human being is a high stage of evolution. Man, to be man, has to depend not on brute-force which he has in common with animals but he ought to depend on soul-force which is *ahimsā* and thus be true to his human dignity: "Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of brute".²⁰⁶ Speaking to a Christian audience at Calcutta on August 8, 1925, he answers the question he poses to himself during the talk: "Is it human to refrain from retaliation?", by saying that some of the finest writers in Europe and even in India said that it is not, but that he could not agree with such an opinion because he felt that man would not realize his full dignity until he had learnt to refrain from retaliation. He also felt that if India

²⁰² **Young India**, May 17, 1919, in **CW XV** (1918-1919) no. 190, p. 202-203. Already in Stage I, he had seen that there need not be one universal religion. Thus replying to his cousin Jamnadas Gandhi on January 30, 1913: "Personally I think the world as a whole will never have, and need not have, a single religion" [**CW XII** (1913-1914) no. 69, p. 94]. Again in another place: "In fact, there are as many paths as there are human beings. So long as men differ, their paths are bound to differ. He who seeks the identity of his *ātman* with the *ātmans* of others will also see unity in religion" [**CW XII** (1913-1914) no. 89, p. 127].

²⁰³ **Mantra**: prayer, incantation, magic, powerful formula, etc.

²⁰⁴ **Navajivan**, April 20, 1924, in **CW XXIII** (1922-1924) no. 357, p. 468.

²⁰⁵ **Navajivan**, June 14, 1925, in **CW XXVII** (1925) no. 136, p. 235-236.

²⁰⁶ **Navajivan**, September 11, 1920, in **CW XIX** (1920-1921) no. 91, p. 133; also cf. **CW XIX** (1920-1921) no. 59, p. 90.

follows the lead of Europe as it then was doing, India would end up as "one of the exploiters of the weaker races of the world" and hence he would categorically say that to refrain from retaliation is human: "I say it is human. Up to now we have not realized our humanity, we have not realized our own dignity".²⁰⁷ The whole *satyāgraha* technique employing *ahimsā* was, in his thinking, designed to humanize man who has unwittingly been brutalized into thinking that only brute-force can succeed, thus forgetting his true nature. It was an appeal to the better side of man, his finer feelings. He believed that when the oppressor saw the innocent, non-violent, voluntary suffering of the *satyāgrahi*, his human feelings or still better, the Truth that is in him and in the *satyāgrahi* and in the universe itself, would make the oppressor to vacate his oppression, injustice, his untruth. In this manner, the oppressor moves from untruth to truth.

The *ahimsā* that Gandhi preached, was not well understood either in India or abroad. To some it appeared nothing short of an utopian dream. Here is an interesting clarification that he gives: a certain correspondent from California had tried to show him the futility of trying to plead with the 'British lion' and appeal to its soul. It would be as futile as trying to plead with a lion which had attacked his grand-daughter, to let go its prey! Gandhi replied saying that the correspondent was woefully ignorant of recent history (perhaps referring to his successful *satyāgraha* in South Africa) and the movement he headed was not primarily an appeal to the soul of the British lion but rather to the soul of India to find self-respect, dignity and strength. Thus, becoming equal to the British, India would deal with them as with equals, though of course, in the final analysis it is an appeal to the soul of the British lion. It is "an appeal from an equal to an equal, not an appeal of a beggar to a possible donor, or the vain appeal of a dwarf to a giant to save him. It will then be an irresistible appeal of soul to soul".²⁰⁸ Again *ahimsā* is not softness. Writing to another one in India, he counsels: "My own opinion is that softness and *ahimsā* go ill together. You have to be sometimes hard in order to be really and truly kind".²⁰⁹ Thus *ahimsā* in-

²⁰⁷ CW XXVIII (1925) no. 10, p. 21-22.

²⁰⁸ *Young India*, September 9, 1925, in CW XXVIII (1925) no. 124, p. 220-221.

²⁰⁹ Letter to Konda Venkatappayya Garu, September 9, 1926, in CW XXXI (1926) no. 481, p. 446.

volves a certain amount of fearlessness, a readiness to lose everything. He saw that fearlessness makes one independent and ready for the noblest action: "... readiness to die goes hand in hand with giving up the desire to kill. When we are ready to die, no one will be particularly eager to kill us ... we may be killed only if we wish to kill others. Serpents bite us only because they fear us".²¹⁰ He further sees that such a fear is a lack of faith and trust in God. The one who trusts in violence and physical strength has little faith in God:

*Fear of man argues want of faith in God. Only he trusts to his physical strength who has no faith or very little faith in God's omnipresence ... The first, viz., reliance on God and shaking off the fear of man is the way of non-violence and the best way. The second, viz., reliance on one's physical might is the way of violence.*²¹¹

This is understandable from his reliance on the omnipresence and omnipotence of Truth which can never be defeated. All this could still be misunderstood and another question came up which enabled him to clarify still further what he meant. There were series of incidents involving dacoity in the suburbs of Bombay. Some had lost their lives and property. Would non-violence work in such a situation? He would answer that a man who cannot protect himself in a crisis is an incomplete man. If he can, he should courageously withstand the dacoits with soul-force but if he is not proficient in that, then he should employ physical force. Both, i.e. the one who resists by soul-force as well as the one who uses physical force, face death with courage and that is proper but if they run away, both stand condemned as cowards. So he would say: "one should cultivate the strength for self-defence to the best of one's ability".²¹² So *ahimsā* and cowardice cannot go together. In another context he tells the listeners that every man grows steadily from an animal state to a human level when his reason develops. And so the enlightened man, as he grows up, develops his soul-power but if such a man were to run away in the face of brute-force, he would only be a coward: "We would neither be beast, nor men, we would simply be cowards".²¹³ Thus *ahimsā* was, for him, the highest form of courage. From this, it also follows

²¹⁰ *Navajivan*, January 1, 1922, in *CW XXII* (1921-1922) no. 78, p. 189.

²¹¹ *Young India*, September 18, 1924, in *CW XXV* (1924-1925) no. 97, p. 135.

²¹² *Navajivan*, June 29, 1924, in *CW XXIV* (1924) no. 166, p. 318-319.

²¹³ *CW XIX* (1920-1921) no. 59, p. 90

that one can truly forgive. When a group of Sikhs were murdered by another group, he counselled them through a letter to forgive and reminded them that such an action would be not weakness but strength because they had physical strength to wreak vengeance on the murderers and yet forgave them: "Only the strong can forgive. You will add to the glory of the martyrdom of the dear ones by refusing to take revenge".²¹⁴ Questioned by others about the validity of such a statement, he reasserted: "I have read the foregoing again and again. I feel if I had to rewrite the letter, I should not alter a single word in it".²¹⁵ Thus *ahimsā* is a position of moral strength and not weakness. Again it meant not merely a negative state of harmlessness but a positive state of love which leads one to refuse to cooperate with the evil of another, though it may hurt the evil-doer physically. And he gives an example of someone who would withdraw support from his son who leads a life of shame. Such a withdrawal is a refusal to cooperate with evil that the son is perpetrating, though such a refusal may even lead to the death of the son. This, however, is no compulsion exercised on the son, but a means of making him realize his mistake: "And the same love imposes on me the obligation of welcoming him to my bosom when he repents. But I may not by physical force compel my son to become good—that in my opinion is the moral of the story of the Prodigal Son".²¹⁶

The *ahimsā* that Gandhi preached was not restricted only to human beings. It is the cultivation of an attitude towards all life. It would be universal and extend to even subhuman life. Here Gandhi was in line with Jain philosophy which is prevalent especially in Gujarat, his native state. However, he reads that philosophy into the scriptures of other religions also. Thus he says:

*Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives. It therefore embraces even sub-human life not excluding insects or beasts ... If we only knew the mind of the creator, we should find their proper place in his creation. Non-violence is therefore, in its active form, good will towards all that life. It is pure love. I read it in the Hindu scriptures, in the Bible, in the Koran.*²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Letter to Lahore Sikhs, March 4, 1921, in *CW XIX* (1920-1921) no. 204, p. 401.

²¹⁵ *Young India*, March 16, 1921, in *CW XIX* (1920-1921) no. 219, p. 427.

²¹⁶ *Young India*, August 25, 1920, in *CW XVIII* (1920) no. 114, p. 195.

²¹⁷ *Young India*, March 9, 1922, in *CW XXIII* (1922-1924) no. 13, p. 24.

He was made the President of the Cow-Protection Society. Though for many of his co-religionists, the cow may be an object of worship, for him, the cow was a symbol: "It means protection of all that lives and is helpless and weak in the world".²¹⁸ When Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the future first prime minister of independent India and a rationalist in many respects, had questioned him about his cow-protection policy which appeared to him as being irrational, he replied: "The cow to me is a sermon on pity".²¹⁹ As we have observed earlier, situations and problems made him understand and clarify his position. One such situation was the destroying of rabid dogs by a mill owner friend of his at Ahmedabad. Gandhi had approved it and it raised a hornets' nest around him. He was severely attacked and abuse was poured on him by many in Gujarat because they said that Gandhi had broken the common code of conduct in the area and his own commitment to *ahimsā*. Through a series of articles and replies to questions in *Young India* in 1926, titled "Is this Humanity?", he tried to defend his position. He says that *ahimsā* and truth are his two lungs without which he cannot live. He must be truthful since *ahimsā* is truth. A certain amount of unavoidable violence is present in life²²⁰ and one has to choose the lesser of the two unavoidable, apparent violences. He concludes with almost an apology: "In this straight and narrow observance of this religion of *ahimsa* one has often to know so-called *himsā*²²¹ as the truest form of *ahimsā*. Things in this world are not what they seem and do not seem as they really are",²²² and two weeks later, he again says in reply to further objections: "Merely taking life is not always *himsā*, one may even say that there is sometimes more *himsā* in not taking

218 *Young India*, May 7, 1925, in CW XXVII (1925) no. 18, p. 46.

219 Letter to Nehru, April 25, 1925, in CW XXVI (1925) no. 309, p. 545.

220 Cf. what he has written in reply to a question from a teacher in Kutch, Navajivan, September 1925, in CW XXVIII (1925) no. 135, p. 240-241, where he says that there is a certain amount of violence involved even in eating of fruits and the body itself is an evil and results in suffering. The body needs food and till it disappears when desires have been destroyed permanently, one should eat the minimum and cause the least unavoidable violence which is to be tolerated. A peculiar position indeed, but in line with the Jain philosophy prevalent there.

221 *Himsā*, opposite of *ahimsā*, meaning 'causing hurt', 'suffering', etc.

222 *Young India*, October 21, 1926, in CW XXXI (1926) no. 528, p. 488-489.

life".²²³ Three weeks later in the same controversy, in reply to someone who had taunted him by saying that he as a *Mahātmā* or exalted soul should be unmoved by the suffering around him, he replied that such a person would not be a *Mahātmā* at all: "He is callous, rather than exalted, who has not learnt to melt at others' woe, who has not learnt to see himself in others and others in himself. Intense longing for the happiness of others was the mother of the discovery of *ahimsā*".²²⁴

For Gandhi, *ahimsā* is intimately connected with Truth but it cannot be identified with it. It is only a part of Truth which is much larger. Thus, on the eve of his trial in 1922: "As I proceed in my quest for Truth, it grows upon me that Truth comprehends everything. I often feel that *ahimsā* is in Truth, not vice versa".²²⁵ Four years later, after his prison term, he becomes clearer and it is no more "I often feel", but categorical:

*A truthful man cannot long remain violent. He will perceive in the course of his search that he has no need to be violent and he will further discover that so long as there is the slightest trace of violence in him, he will fail to find the truth he is searching.*²²⁶

There is no need for such a seeker of Truth to be violent. If Truth is what it is, then it will ultimately triumph even if its votaries are few compared to the others: "The truth of a few will count, the untruth of millions will vanish even like the chaff before a whiff of wind".²²⁷ He is also clearer in describing the precise relationship between Truth and *ahimsā*, where the former is the end and the latter the means: "Non-violence is the greatest force man has been endowed with. Truth is the only goal he has. For God is none other than Truth. But Truth cannot be, never will be, reached except through non-violence".²²⁸

²²³ *Young India*, November 4, 1926, in *CW XXXI* (1926) no. 566, p. 525.

²²⁴ *Young India*, November 25, 1926, in *CW XXXII* (1926-1927) no. 63, p. 72.

²²⁵ Letter to Jamnalal Bajaj on March 16, 1922, in *CW XXIII* (1922-1924) no. 48, p. 97.

²²⁶ *Young India*, May 20, 1926, in *CW XXX* (1926) no. 546, p. 462.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *The Hindu*, November 8, 1926, in *CW XXXI* (1926) no. 151, p. 141.

A concept that is not directly connected but allied to the concept of *ahimsā* is the care and concern that we should have for *swadēśi* which literally means what is of one's own country or region. It came also to mean self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Part of the movement was giving up of things foreign, so that local arts and industries may flourish. For Gandhi, its significance was an active love for my neighbour, for his good and prosperity. The neighbour, here meant for him, someone who is physically near. Consequently, he would say that if there were a barber in my village, I ought to go to him rather than to another in the town. The cloth produced in a place, though it may not be excellent, has to be preferred to that which is produced elsewhere. Another interesting observation he gives is that my neighbour whom I ought to love and serve first, may be my enemy but it is this one that has to be served first:

One rule of swadēśi is that in serving people, we should give priority to those who live near us. There is also an opposite rule, that we should serve first those who are distant from us and then those who are near us. Near in the first rule means physically near and distant in the second rule means distant from us mentally. Both may mean the same thing. An enemy may be physically near and distant mentally; we should, despite his being distant, serve him first ... If you ignore your neighbour and seek to serve someone living far away, that would be pride on our part.²²⁹

It would perhaps be not out of place, at the end of this section, to mention that many of the ideas of love, forbearance and forgiveness may seem to have been borrowed from the New Testament. Gandhi would rather say that they are all found in his own Hindu Scriptures but that the New Testament was only an occasion that activated or still better, in his own terminology, confirmed his convictions. However, what he has to say about Europe in this connection, is an interesting observation, made as early as 1921:

The nations of Europe are called Christian but they have forgotten the teachings of Christ. They may read the Bible or study the Hebrew language, but they do not act according to the teachings of the former. This wind blowing from the West is opposed to the teachings of Jesus. They have forgotten Jesus himself.²³⁰

But here was Gandhi, who seems to have grasped the core of the Gospel message which is love for God, expressed through love for fellowmen and

229 Discourses on the Gītā, no. 93, June 29, 1926, in CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 231-232.

230 Speaking to the Parsees at Navsari on April 4, 1921, in CW XX (1921) no. 16, p. 27.

through loving fellowmen, loving God Himself. This was the Truth he was searching. This core message of love, he seemed to have discovered for himself in Hinduism as well as in Islam and other religions. Therefore, leaving aside all the differences of religions, which were all different ways of saying the same thing, different ways of seeking Truth, he seemed to have discovered for himself the one great means underlying all religions, namely, *ahimsā*. It was this *ahimsā* and the firmness of remaining in it to struggle for Truth which is *satyāgraha* that he proposed for all mankind. This is love-force or *ahimsā* which is universal and not restricted to man alone, but a constant attitude of mind towards the whole of creation, a profound respect towards all that God-Truth had made. It is to stand in awe and love before Truth. This then brings us to the last section in this chapter where we ask the question: was there any dialectical tension in his love for God and for fellowmen at this stage?

VI. A dialectical tension between love for God and love for fellowmen at this stage?

Until recently, the age-long ideal in India for anyone who sought God was to renounce family, friends, wealth and all attachments and proceed on a detached life of wandering or inhabit mountains, caves or forests to seek self-realization through the practice of austerities and concentration of mind in deep contemplation. This idea has not disappeared and we can still find such individuals, some genuine, other spurious, of different categories. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Swami Vivēkānanda²³¹ has founded the *Rāmakṛṣṇa Mission*, which presented a combination of commitment to religious aspirations and interest in social work. The monks of the Mission were a new type of renunciants who were actively involved in social upliftment of the people and at the same time presented Hindu religious instruction to them. It remained partisan. Gandhi had not borrowed his ideas from them but made his own synthesis from *Gītā*, Tolstoy, Ruskin, the New Testament and other books he read, and arrived at a

²³¹ Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), originally named Narendra Nath Datta, was a highly intellectual person from Bengal who had joined Ramakṛṣṇa (1836-1886), a mystic and universalist. He had attended the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and had won great applause abroad for presenting the high philosophy behind Hindu religion.

position where there was an integral, harmonious whole with an appeal that went beyond religious affiliations. Replying to Dr. Norman Leys in England on May 28, 1926, through a letter, he lays bare his own vision of an integral whole: "I do not divide different activities —political, social, religious, economical— into water-tight compartments. I look upon them all as one whole each running into the rest and affected by the rest".²³²

Let us try to analyze the various elements and situations before we come to a conclusion. A certain Roman Catholic correspondent had complained to him that many were comparing him to Jesus Christ. Gandhi replies saying that he claims to nothing divine in himself or even to prophethood:

*I am but a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding It. I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face. The whole of my activity, whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian or ethical, is directed to that end.*²³³

His commitment, above everything, was to Truth. This primacy, he never lost sight of in all that he did. Thus he says that for the sake of the country he will give up everything except Truth and non-violence: "For, to me Truth is God and there is no way to find Truth except the way of Non-violence. And I do not seek to serve India at the sacrifice of Truth or God".²³⁴ It is God he will trust in time of trial. Hence, writing to one Mr. Baker in Transvaal, at the end of his imprisonment, he confesses: "... and did I not place my worries at the feet of God I should have gone mad by this time".²³⁵

When he had come out of prison and found the Non-Cooperation Movement in shambles, a certain Pundit Ghasita Ram, President of All-India-Sub-Assistant Surgeons Association, had suggested through an open letter that Gandhi should retire from all politics and spend his time in

²³² CW XXX (1926) no. 587, p. 492.

²³³ *Young India*, September 11, 1924, in CW XXV (1924-1925) no. 84, p. 117.

²³⁴ *Young India*, December 30, 1926 (reporting a speech at Warda), in CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 162, p. 441. The conviction that Truth is God became strong from 1929.

²³⁵ Letter to Mr. Baker, March 18, 1924, in CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 168, p. 267; cf. also letter to D.R. Majli, March 23, 1924, in CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 207, p. 302.

prayer and meditation seeking self-realization since Buddha, Śankaraçārya and Jesus Christ themselves did not succeed in converting others in their life-time, Gandhi replied that he was not worthy to be mentioned in the line of these great persons. He was only a humble seeker after Truth and was all eagerness to reach the goal of self-realization. But, for him, this cannot be reached except through service to the country and thus to humanity itself. As for seeking retirement to pray and meditate, there was no need since he carried a cave about himself in his heart.²³⁶ Indeed, "... a person who has his eyes always fixed on the sky of his heart dwells in God every moment, whether walking or eating or drinking or in any condition whatever".²³⁷ And anyone who has God in his heart and meditates on him and repeats his name cannot but express it in action: "What is in one's heart is certain to be expressed in one's actions".²³⁸ Such an action is not an action divorced from God but rather it is to act with Him and even like Him: "To realize God means to work like God, with single-minded devotion and ceaseless vigilance. Though living in the human body, we should imitate God as much as we can".²³⁹ If, on the contrary, he were to abandon action and retire to the Himalayas and live there in peace, it would be the height of selfishness and sin: "I must, therefore, remain in the midst of these responsibilities, and win *mōkṣa* through them".²⁴⁰ He would also advise others to do likewise. Thus a certain student Ganpat had written to him to say that he wanted to run away from home and live the life of a renunciant since he had seen an injustice. Gandhi wrote trying to recall him from his hasty action which he called cowardice. He will acquire no wisdom by this action. Rather he should undertake service in the midst of ordinary daily life: "We may follow the path trodden by many. This is the royal road".²⁴¹

236 Cf. *Young India*, April 3, 1924, in *CW XXIII* (1922-1924) no. 256, p. 349.

237 *Discourses on the Gita*, no. 107, July 15, 1926, in *CW XXXII* (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 249.

238 *Navajivan*, October 4, 1925, in *CW XXVIII* (1925) no. 159, p. 286.

239 *Discourses on the Gītā*, no. 67, May 12, 1926, in *CW XXXII* (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 202.

240 *Discourses on the Gītā*, no. 68, May 13, 1926, in *CW XXXII* (1926-1927) no. 86, p. 205.

241 *Navajivan*, July 20, 1924, in *CW XXIV* (1924) no. 215, p. 409-411.

Thus with this perception that he cannot seek God-Truth fully, except through the path of service, he entered politics which was necessary for service. For him, religion and politics can well go together. He declares categorically: "I do not believe that religion has nothing to do with politics. The latter divorced from religion is like a corpse only fit to be buried".²⁴² Writing to his friend, Rev. C.F. Andrew, he says that, for him, to enter politics is part of his life and he recounts an incident where the British politician Montagu had expressed surprise at finding Gandhi in politics, for which he had replied that without it, he could not fulfil his religious and social work. He concludes by saying: "I think the reply will stand good to the end of my life".²⁴³ He declared that it was the only way for any Indian who wants to be religious. We should, however, note that he gives his own meaning to the word 'politics' which, for him, includes all public service: "... one who aspires to a truly religious life cannot fail to undertake public service as his mission".²⁴⁴ Yet politics cannot take the upper hand and make him untrue: "I have presented non-cooperation in terms of religion because I enter politics only in so far as it develops the religious faculty in me".²⁴⁵ When Arya Samajists²⁴⁶ asked him to either quit politics and become a *saṁnyāsin* or be a politician and not act like a religious leader, he replied that his politics was always subservient to religion. It was part of his religious life of service and this attitude is clear when he says: "I should discard them today if they hindered it. I cannot therefore subscribe to the doctrine that I may not, being a political leader deal with matters religious".²⁴⁷ What does he mean when he says politics go hand in hand with religion? Which religion does he refer to, we may ask. He is clear when he says that it transcends all religions:

It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find fuller expression and which leaves the soul utterly

²⁴² Speaking at a Missionary Conference in Madras on February 14, 1916, in CW XIII (1915-1917) no. 169, p. 221.

²⁴³ Letter to C.F. Andrews, July 6, 1918, in CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 335, p. 477-478.

²⁴⁴ CW XIV (1917-1918) no. 122, p. 201.

²⁴⁵ *Young India*, January 19, 1921, in CW XIX (1920-1921) no. 121, p. 238.

²⁴⁶ An extremist Hindu-revival group founded in 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883).

²⁴⁷ *Young India*, June 19, 1924, in CW XXIV (1924) no. 140, p. 266.

*restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.*²⁴⁸

It is such a religious spirit that he intended in politics.

He had well understood the habit of many, only to repeat God's name many times over, using the beads of the rosary or only pay regular visits to the temple but who do nothing more. Time and again, he never fails to remind them that while these could be useful, they are of no avail if unaccompanied by acts of genuine service. He would tell the women too that they should not just stop at prayers or even at service in their homes. Their prayer must lead them to public service also.²⁴⁹ Once a Sikh gentleman had suggested that organized, continuous invocation of God's name by people of different religions, using whatever name each one is accustomed to would bring freedom faster than any *swadēshi* movement. Gandhi replied: "I am certain that one cannot attain heaven through mere repetition of words. One must be fit for such a repetition",²⁵⁰ and it is good actions that purify the minds and hearts. The strongest and in a way the strangest statement he made was when he said: "Even God cannot make a gift of *swarāj*".²⁵¹ When a certain Rajabali Jhinabhai protested against the statement that many would not understand the remark and would think he was limiting the power of God, he goes on to explain: "... I may therefore, have hurt religious-minded people. I count myself a religious-minded man. I believe in the reality of God. I have merely stated a plain fact in plain language and drawn attention to God's law".²⁵² Obviously, what he was trying to say was

²⁴⁸ *Young India*, May 12, 1920, in *CW XVII* (1920) no. 165, p. 406.

²⁴⁹ Cf. *CW XIV* (1917-1918) no. 24, p. 87; no. 230, p. 337; *CW XV* (1918-1918) no. 424, p. 485; no. 395, p. 443-444; *CW XVII* (1920) no. 110, p. 326; *CW XVIII* (1920) no. 180, p. 319-320; *CW XXV* (1924-1925) no. 39, p. 59-60; *CW XXXI* (1926) no. 555, p. 511. Any careful perusal can make us discover many such references. Some of them sound like the prophets of Israel.

²⁵⁰ *Navajivan*, October 30, 1921, in *CW XXI* (1921) no. 159, p. 372; also cf. no. 168, p. 392.

²⁵¹ *Navajivan*, May 15, 1921, in *CW XX* (1921) no. 47, p. 99-100.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

that human cooperation is necessary.²⁵³ He concludes: "Hence even our prayer should be not for *swarāj* but for strength to win it".²⁵⁴

Someone had asked him which was better: to spend time in doing God's work or to spend the time in reciting God's name. He answers:

*In my opinion, God's name and God's work go hand in hand. There is no question of preference because the two are indivisible. A parrot-like repetition of the name is worse than useless, and service or action without the consciousness that it is done in God's name and for God's sake is also valueless ... Continued service in that spirit (spirit of self-dedication) is itself equal to the repetition of the name of the deity. In the vast majority of cases, however, the setting apart a part of our time for prayer is a vital necessity.*²⁵⁵

It is here that we notice how he tries to balance both prayer and action. The love for God and love for man is also similarly well-balanced in his thinking. The two terms are not identical. If it were so, then one could neglect one and choose the other or even emphasize one and neglect the other. Both remain and are to be held in a dialectical tension. Though we found that he did seem to prefer God to man, if service to man were to prove a real hindrance in his search for God, it is to be assumed that he would never consider it a hindrance but rather a help in his quest. That it be a help and not a hindrance is due to the spirit of self-dedication that one practises. This self-dedication is done through a training of the will through well-made vows and which enables one to remain in Truth. Hence, the dialectical tension between love of God and love of man is one of progress and not a regress because one grows in the self-realization. This self-realization is a movement from levels of untruths to Truth and it is in Truth that one finally comes to perfect rest, the fully realized person, the one who has entered *mōkṣa*. But that final synthesis is hard to come by. One has to move constantly from partially

²⁵³ Compare this with what he said to well-meaning persons who told him that he should spend the year of his voluntary political retirement in U.S.A., Europe or South Africa. He replied that if the people were fed up with him, he would retire to the cave in the Himalayas which is within his own heart. But all this was not to be his own choice but as God would show: "Even this I will not myself seek, it will come seeking me. The devotee does not himself go to God. If he did, he would not be able to bear His dazzling light. Hence God Himself comes down to His devotees and appears to them in the form in which they have adored Him. My God knows that I am impatiently waiting His coming; a mere signal from Him will suffice for me" [CW XXIX (1925-1926) no. 70, p. 336].

²⁵⁴ CW XX (1921) no. 47, p. 100.

²⁵⁵ Letter to Mr Shevakram on March 21, 1924, in CW XXIII (1922-1924) no. 191, p. 289.

grasped truths to praxis. So when we carefully observe his thought, we notice that the dialectics is really between partial truths. Accordingly, my perception of my fellowmen's existential reality is also partial and one moves from one partial realization to another which is a constant process. Gandhi perceived that any suppression of one element in this process would mean stopping of the search, failure of his experiments, a stopping at partial truth, whereas the whole movement is towards the Total Truth or full Realization!

Chapter III

The third stage:

From silence to action 1927-1942

The fifteen years covered at this stage were years of intense, hectic activity on the part of Mahatma Gandhi. They do not form one unified whole but could be subdivided into further units according to different movements and settings. Thus the out-break of World War II and the years that followed cannot be easily compared with the years of his popular tours during 1927-1930 nor would they compare with the comparative lull in politics during 1935-1938. Yet these kaleidoscopic activities somehow form a loose oneness and Gandhi's activities seem to be set according to a master plan, slowly and steadily working towards a set goal. Nevertheless it is true that he did not foresee everything nor did he have a clear set plan but rather he adjusted himself to changed circumstances instinctively and with rare insight. Freedom was the goal and the means definitely was non-violence but what these meant seems to change according to situations.

L The historical background and biographical notes

At the end of his year of political silence 1926, he found himself somewhat side-tracked by the Congress and from January till March of 1927, he undertook a hectic programme of travelling and addressing various groups and gatherings with the one message of hand spinning and wearing of clothes made from hand-spun cloth. This was his *Khādi* Programme. He perceived its implications for the poor in India, especially its rural population. We find the following in a Hindi Newspaper *Aaj*, January 12, 1927, reporting a speech at a public meeting in Banares:

There is nowhere else in the world such stark poverty as prevails in India. The poor want work. The peasantry want work for four months of the year. The purpose is not fulfilled simply by distributing money among the poor. This will make beggars of them. The best occupation for them is the Charkhā [spinning wheel]. No one has told me that there can be any simpler occupation than the Charkhā. I therefore appeal to you to wear khādi; ply the charkhā and help in this programme ... God dwells in our hearts. If we listen to Him we shall know that it is our duty to wear cloth made by poor people.¹

¹ CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 230, p. 539 (parenthesis is mine).

By the end of March, he had high blood pressure and a mild stroke of Apoplexy. After an enforced rest, he began again his tours in August, travelling all over South India. Invited, he hurried to Delhi in November to meet the viceroy who announced the arrival of the Simon Commission from England to study political reforms. Gandhi felt that a letter would have been enough instead of dragging him to Delhi, just to give this piece of information. He had to travel back all the way to resume his tour which included such far flung places as Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Orissa. Even this little picture is enough to show the hectic activity in which he was plunged, covering thousands of miles.

To the accusation that he seemed to have changed his views on non-cooperation with the British Indian Government, he vigorously protested: "... not only have I not changed the views that I held in 1921 ... but have been confirmed more and more in those views".² However, the vigour of the Hindu-Muslim unity movement was lost, though Gandhi said that he had only changed the method of approach:

*My interest and faith in Hindu-Muslim unity among all communities remain as strong as ever. My method of approach has changed. Whereas formerly I tried to achieve it by addressing meetings, joining in promoting and passing resolutions, now I have no faith in these devices. We have no atmosphere for them ... I therefore rely upon prayer and such individual acts of friendship as possible ... I am out of tune with the present temper of both communities ... Both my creed and I are therefore on trial. And if we do not seem to succeed, let the critic or onlooker blame not the creed but me.*³

The Muslim community as a whole, barring a few individuals, drifted away to become a strong opposing factor during the stage we are considering in this chapter. His faith in the British fair play and justice was also shattered. Thus he was unwilling to pass a resolution at the 1927 Congress session to ask for a release of prisoners:

*Time was when I used to analyze these cases and expose the injustice done in many of them. But that was when I had faith in the British system and when I used to take pride in its ultimate goodness. Having lost that faith, I have lost also the power of making an effective appeal to the administrators of the system.*⁴

² CW XXXV (1927-1928) no. 94, p. 151.

³ *Young India*, December 1, 1927, in CW XXXV (1927-1928) no. 235, p. 353.

⁴ *Young India*, December 29, 1927, in CW XXXV (1927-1928) no. 316, p. 425-426.

Early in 1928, there was a rift between Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (the future first Prime Minister of independent India) and Gandhi. Nehru was for a declaration of independence and felt that Gandhi seemed to be obscurantist in his policies, emphasizing the spinning wheel and seemed to have become wavering, listless after the recent prison term.⁵ Gandhi replied vigorously:

*I do not know whether you still believe in unadulterated non-violence. But even if you have altered your views, you could not think that unlicensed and unbridled violence is going to deliver the country ... In every struggle bands of men who would submit to discipline are needed.*⁶

During this year, he conducted the Bardoli *satyāgraha* through his deputy Sardar Vallabhai Patel (the future deputy Prime Minister of independent India and reputed 'Iron-Man of India'). The problem was about the revision of assessment of land revenues and its arbitrariness. The *satyāgraha* was successful and he felt that it was all due to his *āśram*. Writing to Motilal Nehru (father of Jawaharlal Nehru and a leading Congressman) on August 21, 1928:

*I do not know whether you are aware that Bardoli was possible because the āśram was in existence. The majority of the workers in Bardoli owe their preparation to the āśram directly or to its indirect influence. If I could but make of the āśram what I want, I should be ready to give battle on an extensive scale.*⁷

Consequently, he spent most of the year at his Sabarmati Asram, revising its rules and scrutinizing its activities. He realized that it could not be an *āśram* in the traditional meaning and so he changed its name to *Udyōga Mandir* (abode of labour) to coincide with the emphasis placed on work. But the popular name Sabarmati *āśram* persisted. Soon he was disillusioned about the *āśram*. He published a confession in the **Bombay Chronicles** (to give wider publicity), April 8, 1929 that Chagganlal Gandhi, his cousin^{son}, who had been a co-worker for thirty years had been found guilty of petty larceny for a number of years at the *āśram*; Mrs. Kasturba Gandhi had indulged in putting by some money for herself; there had been also a case of moral lapse on the part of a widow, contrary to the *brahmaçārya* (celibacy) vow. He drew

⁵ CW XXXV (1927-1928) Appendix X, p. 540-544.

⁶ Letter to Nehru, January 4, 1928, in CW XXXV (1927-1928) no. 323, p. 433; cf. also letter, January 17, 1928, in CW XXXV (1927-1928) no. 356, p. 469-470.

⁷ CW XXXVII (1928) no. 233, p. 194.

an interesting conclusion from all these lapses. The person to be blamed is himself!

*I sincerely believe that the impurity of my associates is but the manifestation of the hidden wrongs within me. I have never claimed perfection for myself. Who knows my aberrations in the realm of thought have reacted on the environment around me. The epithet 'Mahātmā' has always galled me and now it almost sounds to me like a term of abuse.*⁸

At the end of 1928, the annual session of Indian National Congress took a momentous decision at Calcutta. The Government was thinking of conceding to Indians a greater share in the Government but the Congress asked for a declaration of Dominion Status by December 30, 1929, failing which, it threatened to launch a movement for full independence. Gandhi now set about preparing the nation for it, first by reforming the Congress organization and insisting on the constructive programmes of *khādi*, prohibition, uplift of the so-called low castes and welding of communal harmony. Gandhi undertook a whirlwind tour of Sind, Burma, Andhra and Almora—all vast distances. He tried to rouse the people from their lethargy; here below is a rare example of irony he used to sting the people to action:

*Our disbelief is an extraordinary phenomenon. We have no faith in our ability to do anything. If it is total prohibition it is regarded as impossible. Hindu-Muslim unity is a day-dream. Removal of untouchability in the face of **Sanātanist** [orthodox Hindus of the extreme variety] opposition is unthinkable. Boycott of foreign cloth through mills we did not achieve, through **Khādi** we cannot achieve. There thus remains nothing we can possibly do. Hence **swarāj** [independence/self-rule] is an impossible proposition and slavery our natural condition. This is a most debasing state for anyone to be in.*⁹

In October 1929, the Government announced a round table conference in London to discuss political reforms in India. The Congress refused to attend it unless it were to discuss the modalities of the demanded Dominion Status. Consequently, at the historical Lahore session between December 28-31, the Congress took the decision for working towards *pūrṇa swarāj* (full independence). Gandhi undertook to ready the nation for 'Civil Disobedience'.

The year 1930 began with a 'Pledge of Independence' taken all over the country on the 26th of January. Gandhi formulated his eleven points demand such as total prohibition, reduction of land revenue, reduction of

⁸ CW XL (1929) no. 191, p. 211-212.

⁹ *Young India*, June 20, 1929, in CW XLI (1929) no. 61, p. 64 (parentheses are mine).

the ratio of the rupee value to the British Sterling, reduction on military expenditure, reduction in the salary paid to Government officials, removal of salt tax ...¹⁰ He insisted upon constructive work before launching civil disobedience since this would train people to be more organized and disciplined; the leaders would also learn to work with the people and the people to trust their leaders. If such a training were achieved, Gandhi was hopeful of success within a few months:

*The more therefore the progress of the constructive programme, the greater is there the chance for civil disobedience. Granted a perfectly non-violent atmosphere and fulfilled constructive programme, I would undertake to lead a mass civil disobedience struggle to a successful issue in the space of a few months.*¹¹

However, he began looking around for a suitable law to break during the expected Civil Disobedience. He finally chose the salt tax. Contrary to many who think that the salt *satyāgraha* was Gandhi's brainwave, the extant documents show that it was rather an idea that matured due to guess work and loud thinking by the press which supplied him with the data he needed.¹² He found that the tax on salt was a phenomenal 1,400%¹³ or it was "five annas per year or nearly three days' income".¹⁴ Plenty of salt is essential in a hot country where dehydration is quick, especially when one labours under the hot sun and many a poor labourer had to depend on a simple meal with just *chappātis* (flattened, roasted thin bread) and salt. There are also social usages connected with salt. So in choosing this, Gandhi was able to appeal to the emotions of every Indian. He chose to march to Dandi, a coastal village 241 miles south of the Sabarmati āśram, on March 12, 1930. But, before doing so, he informed the Viceroy. In the course of the letter he sent through an Englishman Reginald Reynolds, he says:

... The British system seems to be designed to crush the very life out of him [poor peasant]. Even the salt he must use to live is so taxed as to make the burden fall heaviest on him, if only because of the heartless impartiality of its incidence. The tax shows itself still more burdensome on the poor

¹⁰ CW XLII (1929-1930) no. 414, p. 434.

¹¹ *Young India*, January 9, 1930, in CW XLII (1929-1930) no. 362, p. 377.

¹² Cf. CW XLII (1929-1930) no. 473, p. 499-500; no. 472, p. 498-499; no. 475, p. 503; also cf. CW XLIII (1930) Appendix I, p. 453-454.

¹³ CW XLIII (1930) no. 127, p. 128.

¹⁴ CW XLIII (1930) no. 49, p. 51-52.

*man when it is remembered that salt is the one thing he must eat more than the rich man both individually and collectively.*¹⁵

He goes on to point out the great disproportion in the salaries paid to high Government officials (European) and points out the example of the Viceroy's payment:

*You are getting over Rs. 700 per day against India's average income of less than annas 2 [1/8 of a Rupee] per day. The Prime Minister gets Rs. 180 per day against Great Britain's average income of Rs. 2 per day. Thus you are getting much over five thousand times India's average income. The British Prime Minister is getting only ninety times Britain's average income. On bended knees I ask you to ponder over this phenomenon ... A radical cutting down of the revenue, therefore, depends upon an equally radical reduction in the expenses of the administration.*¹⁶

So he asked for the repeal of salt tax and the answer he received was a polite "no". Commenting on it, Gandhi said: "On bended knees I asked for bread and I have received stone instead".¹⁷ The march began with a band of *āśramites* and other volunteers on March 12, 1930. Everywhere they were welcomed enthusiastically and similar marches started in other parts of the country. Gandhi was satisfied with the response: "The awakening of the villages is astonishing which is a good sign".¹⁸ The marchers reached Dandi on April 6, 1930 and Gandhi broke the salt law by picking up salt from the sea shore. The Government was taken aback by the enthusiasm of the response all over the country and so took a prudent step by arresting the leaders one by one, starting from the lowest. Finally Gandhi was arrested on May 5, 1930 and taken to Yeravda prison. Both **Young India** and **Navajivan** ceased publication since the press was confiscated by the Government.

Early in 1931 he was released, he met the Viceroy and on March 5, 1931, an agreement with the Viceroy was made, known as the Gandhi-Irwin pact. Civil Disobedience was suspended and Gandhi, chosen by the Congress, set sail in August to attend the Round Table Conference in London. As expected, nothing came of the conference and Gandhi took the opportunity to visit his friend Romain Rolland at Villeneuve in Switzerland,

¹⁵ CW XLIII (1930) no. 3, p. 4 (parenthesis is mine).

¹⁶ CW XLIII (1930) no. 3, p. 5 (parenthesis is mine).

¹⁷ CW XLIII (1930) no. 49, p. 51.

¹⁸ CW XLIII (1930) no. 267, p. 272.

Mussolini in Rome but the Pope refused to see him. Soon after his return to India on January 3, 1932, the Civil Disobedience was resumed and he landed again in the Yeravda prison. That year, during Fall, the Round Table Conference went ahead without the Congress participation and a system of separate constituency for the suppressed classes ¹⁹ was decided upon. Gandhi felt that this would separate the suppressed classes from the Hindus and would result in many problems. So he undertook his historic fast unto death. He declared: "If the Hindu mass mind is not yet prepared to banish untouchability root and branch, it must sacrifice me without the slightest hesitation".²⁰ Hindu leaders and suppressed class leaders finally came to an agreement of joint electorate with reservation for suppressed classes. The British Premier accepted and Gandhi broke the fast on September 27th, the seventh day of the fast. With this, the Government also allowed him to mount a campaign against untouchability while remaining a prisoner. On February 11, 1933, appeared the first issue of the new newspaper, **Harijan** (literally: God's people —the name had been coined just then to club together all types of suppressed classes. Gandhi chose the same name for his newspaper). For quite some time it was used solely for fighting untouchability and dealt only with the problem of *Harijans*. When he learnt that caste Hindus had not given up their opposition to untouchability, Gandhi undertook a twenty-one days purificatory fast in May 1933. The Government, afraid of the possible consequences of this fast, released him. Gandhi continued and completed his fast successfully. The 'Mass Civil Disobedience' which had been suspended for six weeks was now changed at his behest to 'Individual Civil Disobedience'. On July 28, 1933, he disbanded his *āśram* and offered his individual civil disobedience by refusing to abide by a restriction on his movements. He was rearrested on August 1, 1933 and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. This time, the Government refused to permit him to carry on his *Harijan* work from the prison as before. Gandhi felt that this was against the spirit of the earlier agreement. So he went on an indefinite fast. Since this fast was not long after the previous one, the Government was fearful and released him unconditionally on the eighth day of the fast. Gandhi responded by a voluntary withdrawal from all politi-

¹⁹ Suppressed classes —a common term to indicate and include, albeit with nuances in meanings, terms such as low-castes, out-castes, untouchables, scheduled castes, ...

²⁰ CW LI (1932) no. 83, p. 63.

cal activity till the following August and concentrated on tasks connected with the removal of untouchability and the upliftment of *Harijans*.

Gandhi's frequent recourse to fasts and strange decisions did confuse educated persons and they did not hesitate to question him. To one who had asked whether Gandhi's "fast unto death" was not a loss of faith in non-violence, he replies:

*... let me say that my 'fast unto death' was not due to any loss of faith in non-violence, but it was, as I have already said on more than one occasion, the last seal upon that faith. Sacrifice of self even unto death is the final weapon in the hands of a non-violent person. It is not given to man to do more.*²¹

Similarly, writing to his English follower Mirabeau on May 8, 1933, he notes: "Under certain circumstances it is the only weapon which God has given us for use in times of utter helplessness".²² Asked about the source of his peculiar thoughts and what certitude he had about them, he replies to a certain correspondent on January 27, 1933:

*It is not even possible for me to say how I have arrived at my present outlook upon life as a whole. A multitude of contacts with books, men and events are together responsible for what I am today, as they must be for everyone. Some may have the ability for locating the cause or causes for everything they think, say or do. I confess that I am very stupid and often cannot account for things I do and beliefs I hold and sometimes I fancy that God is speaking or acting through me. I am painfully conscious of the fact that such beliefs may be merely a figment of my imagination, but while it lasts, believe me, it is as true to me as it is that I am dictating this letter to you.*²³

We notice that the way in which he reasons is often by instinct rather than by a cold juggling with dead concepts or logical components. To the reader of his thoughts, it could be exasperating but a little patience and attention can reveal the process of his thoughts. Thus to a correspondent who had complained that Gandhi's elliptical style leaves many things unexplained, he replies:

When I say that my language is imperfect I do not mean that I have inadequate command over the language, although that too is true. What is implied here is that my thoughts are imperfect. Hence there is bound to be

²¹ *Harijan*, March 4, 1933, in *CW* LIII (1933) no. 618, p. 460.

²² *CW* LV (1933) no. 169, p. 151.

²³ *CW* LIII (1933) no. 221, p. 166.

*difficulty in understanding them. As my thoughts mature, they will come to be expressed so as to be easily comprehended. Having admitted this shortcoming in my language, I can still say that some readers do not make the fullest effort and then fail to understand even perfectly expressed ideas and then they blame me.*²⁴

Perhaps it would be proper to mention here the witness of Romain Rolland whom he had visited for five days in Switzerland at the end of 1931:

*His mind proceeds through successive experiments into action and he follows a straight line, but he never stops, and one would risk error in attempting to judge him by what he said ten years ago, because his thought is in constant evolution.*²⁵

The Congress party itself could not understand his antics. Thus in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru on November 11, 1933, he asks to be excused from attending the AICC (All India Congress Committee) meeting during the year: "I stand thoroughly discredited as a religious maniac and predominantly a social worker".²⁶

He spent the year 1934 busy with the problem of untouchability, touring widely and facing the opposition of orthodox Hindus. In January, there was a severe earthquake at Bihar, where thousands died and fields were covered with sand. Gandhi, against a protest from the renowned poet Rabindranath Tagore, continued to interpret the calamity to mean God's punishment for the sins of untouchability in the Hindu community.²⁷ In April, he suspended even the 'Individual Civil Disobedience' and restricted it to himself as a representative. In August, after a seven days' purificatory fast, he decided to leave the Congress so that those who wanted to enter the new legislatures may do so. In a letter to Vallabhai Patel on May 5, 1934, he is apologetic:

*A tree is no more hurt by a ripe fruit falling from it than would the Congress be by my going out of it. Indeed the fruit will be dead weight, if it did not fall when it was fully ripe. Mine is that condition. I feel that I am a dead weight on the Congress now.*²⁸

²⁴ Harijanbandhu, October 22, 1933, in CW LVI (1933-1934) no. 143, p. 128.

²⁵ CW XLVIII (1931-1932) Appendix II, p. 499.

²⁶ CW LVI (1933-1934) no. 188, p. 167.

²⁷ Cf. CW LVII (1934) no. 170, p. 165; cf. also Tagore's interesting letter, *ibid.*, Appendix I, p. 503.

²⁸ CW LVIII (1934) no. 447, p. 404.

Accordingly, in October he quit the Congress with its approval and started AIVIA (All India Village Industries Association) under the Congress aegis. He felt that he must revive village industries which were dying out. His concept revolved around self-sufficiency of the village in every way possible so that the 700,000 villages of India may be lifted up from their lethargy and be vigorous. He wished that the simple villagers may not be lured into cities to lose their identity and wholeness. He remained as an advisor to the Congress and following his suggestion, it underwent further changes regarding membership and delegates for the central committees.

In 1935, he continued to busy himself with AIVIA and towards the middle of the year began to speak of a need for standard wages. He suggested "eight annas for eight hours' strenuous work".²⁹ Towards the end of the year, Gandhi had to slow down again because of blood pressure and he was very near to a breakdown. In 1936, he undertook light tasks, continuing his newspaper the **Harijan** and moved first to Wardha in Maharashtra and then further into an interior village called Segaon (later called Sevāgram) in order to be in a village setting and so experience concretely the difficulties of the villagers there, who were for the most part *Harijans*. There was neither a post-office nor a railway station in that village. At the Gandhi Seva Sangh (an association from 1920 onwards, consisting mostly of Congressmen who followed Gandhi more closely than others) meeting, there was a proposal to set up a committee for Gandhian thought but Gandhi's reaction was that it would be better to follow his life rather than his writings: "

*You will not call it Gandhism; there is no 'ism' about it. And no elaborate literature is needed about it ... Those who believe in these can propagate them only by following them in practice. They call for no books. My work is there for them to emulate.*³⁰

As an aside, we may mention that about this time, his eldest son, Harilal, who was a drunkard, had reformed himself for a short while but then had relapsed and left him again to become a Muslim under the name of Abdulla.

The year 1937 saw some of his efforts beginning to bear fruit. The Travancore kingdom had thrown open its temples to the Harijans and some

²⁹ **Harijan**, July 13, 1935, in **CW LXI** (1935) no. 359, p. 249-251. The daily wages at this time were even lower —below one anna in some cases, i.e. 1/16 of one Rupee.

³⁰ **CW LXII** (1935-1936) no. 267, p. 224-225.

other temples also followed suit. The Congress which had entered the legislatures began to accept office in five provinces where they had the majority. Gandhi began to use his newspaper the **Harijan** to write on political matters also. From October, his attention turned towards basic education whereby he wanted a thorough-going reform in the existing educational system which he felt was only providing clerks for the British Government and not really educating the people. His idea revolved around a self-supporting, work-oriented, integral education. In December, he again suffered from high blood pressure and was again on the verge of a nervous breakdown. It is interesting to note that he seems to move from an emphasis on one activity to an emphasis on another, ever discovering newer vistas of service. Thus, at one time it was Hindu-Muslim unity; at another it became *khādi* work; then again upliftment of the untouchables; then on to village industries and finally basic education besides the off and on emphasis on prohibition and upliftment of women. Writing to his friend, C.F. Andrews, he notes: "All these things run into one another and are inter-dependent. You will find at one time in my life an emphasis on one thing, at other times on other. But that is just like a pianist, now emphasizing one note and now another".³¹ Replying to another correspondent and justifying these constant changes:

*... I do not divide life into watertight compartments. The life of a nation like that of individuals is an indivisible whole ... I claim to be conducting my experiments in a scientific spirit. In the garden of non-violence are many plants. They are all from the same parent. They may not be all used simultaneously. Some are less powerful than others. All are harmless. But they have to be handled skilfully. I am applying such skills to their use as God has given me. But because I use one plant rather than another at any time, it does not follow that I give up the fight. It is a fight to the finish. Defeat has no place in the dictionary of non-violence.*³²

1938 was a year of many troubles. It was a year marred by communal violences, the Hindu-Muslim riots. The Muslim League, under M.A. Jinnah, began to ask for an independent Pakistan. Speaking to the Gandhi Seva Sangh, Gandhi declared: "Just as I say that I do not want *swarāj* if it is to be won through untruth and violence, today I would also say that I do not want *swarāj* without Hindu-Muslim unity".³³ There were also many other violent incidents in the native states, involving Congressmen. The corrup-

³¹ CW LV (1933) no. 235, p. 199.

³² CW LXIV (1936-1937) no. 387, p. 385.

³³ CW LXVI (1937-1938) no. 528, p. 446-447.

tion charges against Congressmen and their scandalous scramble for power increased.³⁴ All these led Gandhi into a deep depression around July: "I am praying for light that will dispel the darkness. Let those who have a living faith in non-violence join me in the prayer".³⁵ He came out of it with great difficulty.

In March 1939, he undertook a *satyāgraha* in the native state of Rajkot. The ruler had gone back on his word at the instigation of his chief minister, a certain Durbar Virawala. Gandhi started a hunger strike and appealed to the Viceroy to intervene. The Viceroy appointed a judge to look into the case and Gandhi broke his fast. The judge delivered a verdict favourable to Gandhi but the Durbar Virawala turned the tables on him by creating other troubles, thus preventing a solution. Gandhi suddenly realized that his own approach had been wrong. Instead of appealing to the finer feelings of Virawala, he had appealed to the Viceroy, perhaps with hidden anger and impatience. Hence he had failed. He apologized to Virawala and left the matter in the hands of the ruler. He also realized that if *satyāgraha* had not so far succeeded in achieving independence for India, it was all due to the hidden violence in the masses which did not really accept on a mass scale his constructive programme and the Congress itself did not seem to be fully convinced of the programme. There was, then, a hidden corruption.³⁶ He felt that even he was imperfect in his love:

*In theory, if there is sufficient non-violence developed in any single person, he should be able to discover the means of combating violence, no matter how widespread or severe, within his jurisdiction. I have repeatedly admitted my imperfections. I am no example of perfect *ahimsā*. I am evolving.³⁷*

His non-violence appeared to be an ideal towards which he was going and hence he was not loath to acknowledge his faults;

... I have got the credit for trying my best to live up to the ideal I may profess. If I am to make an ever-increasing approach to my ideal, I must let the world see my weakness and failures so that I may be saved from hypocrisy and so that even for very shame I would try my utmost to realize

³⁴ Cf. CW LXVIII (1938-1939) no. 141, p. 124-125.

³⁵ *Harijan*, July 23, 1938, in CW LXVII (1938) no. 267, p. 198.

³⁶ cf. *Harijan*, July 8, 1939, in CW LXIX (1939) no. 411, p. 389-392.

³⁷ *Harijan*, July 8, 1939, in CW LXIX (1939) no. 411, p. 389.

*the ideal ... between the ideal and practice there always must be an unbridgeable gulf. The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realize it. The pleasure lies in making the effort, not in its fulfilment. For, in our progressing towards the goal we ever see more and more enchanting scenery.*³⁸

In September, World War II broke out and India was dragged into it as a subject nation of England. In October, the Congress ministries resigned because they had not been consulted before the declaration. The Congress demanded that Britain should clarify its war aims and give up its own imperialism in the world. The Muslim League leader, M.A. Jinnah, rejoiced at the resignations and called on the Muslims to observe December 22nd as a 'Day of Deliverance' from Hindu rule.

In 1940, the Congress urged Gandhi to take advantage of the war to launch yet another 'Mass Civil Disobedience'. Gandhi refused, since he did not want to embarrass Britain and also because the people were not yet ready, not having fully practised the constructive programme. He was not sure that they would be non-violent. Exasperated, the Congress passed at Pune in July the resolution of C. Rajagopalachari (the future first and last Indian Governor-General of independent India) calling for non-violent means to obtain freedom from Britain but not for the exclusion of violence to defend India from external aggression and even co-operation with Britain in the war if independence were assured at the end of the war. Gandhi was absolved from leadership, withdrew and addressed an interesting letter "To every Briton",³⁹ calling on them to lay down their arms and fight rather with non-violence. Gandhi, however, was moved by qualms of conscience for meekly surrendering to the Congress resolution at Pune. In August, he came in again at the Bombay meeting of the Congress, reversed the previous resolution and resumed leadership, declaring non-violence as the only means even in war and demanded the right to preach against war. He now expanded his constructive programme to include thirteen items;⁴⁰ nor were

³⁸ *Harijan*, October 14, 1939, in *CW LXX* (1939) no. 277, p. 241.

³⁹ *Harijan*, July 6, 1940, in *CW LXXII* (1940) no. 281, p. 229-231.

⁴⁰ *Harijan*, August 18, 1940, in *CW LXXII* (1940) no. 433, p. 378-381. The thirteen-fold constructive programme included: 1° communal unity; 2° eradiction of untouchability; 3° prohibition; 4° *khādi*; 5° other village industries; 6° village sanitation; 7° basic education; 8° adult education; 9° uplift of women; 10° hygiene and health education; 11° national language (*Rashtrabhāṣa*); 12° mother tongue; 13° economic equality.

these exhaustive. He went on to increase them later. The whole motive was to test and see the resolve of the people. In October, he cautiously authorized 'Individual Civil Disobedience' and sent selected persons into prison one by one.

Early in 1941, Subhas Chandra Bose, a volatile national leader from Bengal escaped to Germany with a view to liberate India using the assistance of the Axis powers. Britain went on cleverly asserting that it would consider any handing over of power (at least as a 'Dominion') only if there were communal agreements and the princes too agreed. Moderates in India tried to bring about such an understanding between the Muslim League and the Congress but failed repeatedly. There were communal riots. Meanwhile the Congress was losing patience with Gandhi's policy of not embarrassing the British. In December, the Congress relieved him of the leadership of 'Civil Disobedience Movement'. In the month that followed, he declared in his characteristic way at the AICC meeting at Wardha the reason why he insisted on non-violence:

*I have been taunted as a **Bania** [merchant caste]. It is all right. How can I help it? I was born a **Bania**. I shall stay a **Bania** and shall die as a **Bania**. Trade is my profession. I am trading with you and with the world. The article in my possession is an invaluable pearl. It has to be weighed in the proper scales ... I am a trader in **ahimsā**. Those who can pay the price for it may have it. In my view, it cannot be bartered away even for independence. But you do not value this thing as I do; because you do not have the scales with which to weigh it.⁴¹*

1942 saw the Japanese at the borders of India, having overrun Singapore, Malaya and Burma which were then under the British. Invasion was imminent, a few border posts had already been lost and two or three places had been bombed. Gandhi had the boldness to address a letter to Japan (which was published in Japanese papers),⁴² asking them to leave India alone. He also addressed another letter "To every Briton",⁴³ asking that Britain should forthwith relinquish its hold on India and withdraw in an orderly way unlike the disorderly way they had to leave Burma. If they left, then the Japanese would have no interest in coming to India and even if

⁴¹ CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 302, p. 220-221 (parenthesis is mine).

⁴² *Harijan*, July 26, 1942, in CW LXXVI (1942) no. 351, p. 309-312.

⁴³ Cf. CW LXXVI (1942) no; 126, p. 98-100.

they did, they would be resisted in a non-violent way.⁴⁴ He was bold enough to declare that both the Allies and the Axis were wrong:

I see no difference between the Fascists or Nazi powers and Allies. All are exploiters, all resort to ruthlessness to the extent required to compass their end. America and Britain are very great nations, but their greatness will count as dust before the bar of dumb humanity, whether African or Asiatic. They and they alone have the power to undo the wrong. They have no right to talk of human liberty and all else unless they have washed their hands clean of the pollution.⁴⁵

Elsewhere, he had said that there was not much of a difference between Nazism and Imperialism: "We here perceive no difference between Hitlerism and British Imperialism. Hitlerism is a superfine copy of Imperialism and Imperialism is trying to overtake Hitlerism as fast as it can".⁴⁶ Slowly the idea of Gandhi, that Britain must grant independence immediately, began to take root, though many could not grasp its implication. He assured the Allies that it did not mean withdrawal of Allied troops. Free India could make agreement with the Allies who would be allowed to maintain their soldiers to prosecute the war. Free India's willing cooperation in a non-violent way would be there and some Indians on their own would also assist them militarily.⁴⁷ By July, the CWC (Congress Working Committee) passed the 'Quit India' resolution and authorized by the Congress, Gandhi became ready to launch the movement, though he realized that it may involve risks. He had waited enough:

*I always thought that I would have to wait till the country was ready for a non-violent struggle. But my attitude has undergone a change. I feel that if I continue to wait I might have to wait till doomsday. For the preparation that I have prayed and worked for may never come, and in the mean time I may be enveloped and overcome by the flames of violence that are spreading all around ... The people do not have my *ahimsā*. And therefore I have to take a risk, if I cannot curb their violence. I cannot remain inactive ... we have to take the risk of anarchy if God wills it. However, we shall try our best to prevent violence. If in spite of that there is violence then it is His wish. I am not responsible for that.⁴⁸*

44 CW LXXVI (1942) no. 232, p. 193.

45 CW LXXVI (1942) no. 225, p. 187.

46 CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 58, p. 37.

47 Cf. letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, September 1, 1942, in CW LXXVI (1942) no. 310, p. 264-265; cf. also interview to Preston Gover around June 10, 1942, in CW LXXVI (1942) no. 250, p. 207-212.

48 CW LXXVI (1942) no. 190, p. 159-160.

On August 8, 1942, the AICC at its Bombay session passed the 'Quit India' resolution and on the following day the leaders were arrested and transported to different places. Gandhi was lodged at the Aga Khan palace, Pune.

II. A genuine search for God

During this stage, his search for God continued with ever greater earnestness and became concretized in the growing number of activities for the neighbour. The situations were also constantly changing but the undercurrent of all was his search for God, for genuineness. As in the previous stages, we shall subdivide this article into two, namely, a search for Truth and his concept of God.

A. A search for Truth—God

As in the previous stage, his search for God was manifested as a search for truth and genuineness in all that he thought, said and did. But by far the clear advance he makes during this stage is his reversing of the earlier statement "God is Truth" into "Truth is God". This change is evident from 1926 onwards but stronger from 1929. He gives his own explanation for this change. Thus writing on July 22, 1930, from Yeravda gaol to his nephew Narandas Gandhi, he gives him the text of a talk to be read during *āśram* morning prayer:

*The word **satya** is derived from "**sat**", which means that which is. **Satya** means a state of being. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why **sat** or **satya** is the right name for God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say that God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or general, the name God is and will remain more current.*⁴⁹

One of his correspondents asked him much later, from where he got this idea and suggested that perhaps he had in front of him the ancient Sanskrit *mantra* (prayer formula) *Hiranmāyena* of *Īśōpaniṣad*, no. 15? Gandhi replied on February 8, 1932 from his prison: "When such things occur to me, they spring straight from the heart as if they were original intuitions ...

⁴⁹ CW XLIV (1930) no. 62, p. 40.

these truths have the certainty of personal experience".⁵⁰ He spells out in a slightly different way to European audiences as to how he came to such a conclusion. Consequently, speaking on December 8, 1931, at Lausanne, he explains:

*I would say for those who say God is love, God is love. But deep down in me I say God may be love, but God is Truth. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, for myself I have come to the conclusion that God is Truth. But two years ago I went a step further and said Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements. God is Truth and Truth is God. And that conclusion I came to after a continuous, relentless search after Truth which began so many years ago. I found that the nearest approach to Truth is through love. But I found also that love has many meanings in the English language at least, and human love in the sense of passion becomes a degrading thing also. I found too that love in the sense of *ahimsā* and non-violence has only limited number of votaries in the world ... It is very difficult to understand "God is love" [because there is a variety of meanings of love] but I never found a double meaning in connection with Truth and not even atheists have denied the necessity or power of Truth. Not only so. In their passion for discovering Truth, they have not hesitated even to deny the very existence of God—from their point of view rightly. And it was because of their reasoning that I saw that I was not going to say "God is Truth", but "Truth is God".⁵¹*

Truth for him was the only reality, the very law of the universe and yet it is a living reality and transforms the worshippers also to be truthful. Replying to a question from a correspondent, he writes from prison on June 13, 1932:

God is Truth. For the past few years I have been saying that "Truth is God" instead of saying that "God is Truth". I feel that this is a more logical way of putting it. Truth is the only reality in this world. Here Truth should be given a wider connotation. It is something living. This Truth that is God and the laws of God are not distinct from one another but are the same thing. Hence Truth, too, is a living thing. Thus it means the same thing to say that this world is governed by Truth or God's laws. There is infinite power in that Truth ... If God exists—though we call Him Truth—it is our duty to worship Him. We become like that which we worship.⁵²

Truth for him is not merely an attribute of God but rather His very nature. It is the very 'to Be' of God. And we too exist and are only to the degree we are true to our nature of being truthful. We notice here a subtle connection between Truth as nature or being to truthfulness as a quality. In God, they co-

⁵⁰ CW XLIX (1932) no. 117, p. 78.

⁵¹ CW XLVIII (1931-1932) no. 259, p. 404; cf. also letter to the Boys and Girls of the āśram on March 21, 1932 from prison, in CW XLIX (1932) no. 264, p. 223 (parenthesis is mine).

⁵² CW L (1932) no. 34, p. 36-37.

incide whereas in us, they seem to be distinct and in a dialectical proportion. In fact, in comparison to Him, the only 'true' reality, all others seem to be false or according to the Indian Philosophical School of *Advaita* (non-dualism), chimerical. Gandhi gets out of the conundrum by precisely saying that by being truthful in our lives, we come 'to be' and are 'true' and closer to Truth-God. Thus in a letter to one P.G. Mathew on July 9, 1932:

*In "God is Truth", "is" certainly does not mean "equal to" nor does it mean "is truthful". Truth is not a mere attribute of God but He is That. He is nothing if He is not That. Truth in Sanskrit means sat. Sat means "Is". Therefore Truth is implied in "Is". God is, nothing else is. Therefore the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God, we ARE only to the extent that we are truthful.*⁵³

The search for Truth thus becomes meaningful and possible. He says elsewhere in another context:

*The very search for Truth becomes interesting, worthwhile, because of this belief [that God exists]. But the search for Truth is search for God. Truth is God. God is, because Truth is. We embark upon the search, because we believe that there is Truth and that It can be found by diligent search and meticulous observance of the well-known and well-tried rules of the search.*⁵⁴

Since Truth is God and hence Infinite, it was easy for Gandhi to conclude that one cannot define truth. Consequently, in a letter dated July 15, 1937: "Even as an absolute definition of God is impossible, so is that of truth impossible. When I can evolve an absolute definition of truth, truth will cease to be my God".⁵⁵ Hence his ceaseless quest for truth, ever close and ever far. We live in truth and can experience it but never fully. It is immortal. Thus reacting to the death of his nephew and co-worker Maganlal Gandhi, a mainstay of his Sabarmati *āśram*, he observes: "No matter if Maganlal has died or others die. All of us will die but the truth which we have thought and lived will never die".⁵⁶

⁵³ CW L (1932) no. 193, p. 175; cf. also CW LXI (1935) no. 120, p. 81.

⁵⁴ CW LIX (1934) no. 46, p. 43 (parenthesis is mine).

⁵⁵ CW LXV (1937) no. 462, p. 398.

⁵⁶ Letter, May 7, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 352, p. 297-298.

Many readers of his newspaper, the Hindi **Navajivan** had argued that faith is beyond reason and could only be blind. Gandhi replied that his view was just the opposite of this:

That which is blind cannot be faith. If someone asserts with full conviction there are flowers in the sky, the assertion cannot be considered valid. For the experience of the vast masses of people contradicts it. Belief in the existence of flowers in the sky is not faith; it is crass ignorance. Whether there are flowers in the sky is amenable to rational enquiry and such an enquiry will prove the falsity of the assertion. On the contrary, when we say, "God is", no one can prove that the proposition is false. However hard we might try through reason to disprove the existence of God, some doubt will remain in the minds of everyone. On the other hand, the experience of millions prove the existence of God. In every matter, faith must be supported by empirical knowledge. For ultimately experience is the basis of faith and everyone who has faith must at some time pass through experience. He who has faith, however, does not desire experience, for true faith does not admit of doubt. This does not mean that one having faith becomes dull-witted. He whose faith is pure always has a sharp wit. His reason tells him that faith is higher than experience, that it transcends experience, that it reaches where reason cannot. The seat of reason is the mind, that of faith is the heart. It has been the uniform experience of man that the heart is thousand times more potent than the mind.⁵⁷

We may consider this as a curious piece of reasoning but for him it was quite valid since he reached out to truth instinctively, which he considered as 'experience' and the experience —be it by oneself or at least a mass experience, was enough as long as the matter or content was reasonable. Ultimately, being experiential, faith is not blind. This is an indication of the way in which he reached out to Truth and held on to it firmly. In another context, he says: "Faith is not a delicate flower which would wither under the slightest stormy weather. Faith is like the Himalaya mountains which cannot possibly change".⁵⁸ This, however, does not mean that he had reached perfect truth. He was only trying to reach out. Writing to a Polish professor who had asked about Gandhi's constantly changing opinions which seemed opportunistic, he notes:

I am a humble but very earnest seeker after truth. And in my search, I take all fellow-seekers in uttermost confidence so that I may know my mistakes and correct them. I confess that I have often erred in my estimates and judgements ... Moreover, there are not many fundamental truths, but there is only one fundamental truth which is Truth itself ... Finite human beings shall never know in its fullness Truth and Love

⁵⁷ CW XLI (1929) no. 386, p. 435-436; cf. also **Young India**, April 14, 1927, in CW XXXIII (1927) no. 244, p. 231-232.

⁵⁸ CW LVII (1934) no. 14, p. 17

*which is in itself infinite. But we do know enough for guidance. We shall err, and sometimes grievously, in our application. But man is a self-governing being, and self-government necessarily includes the power as much to commit errors as to set them right as often as they are made.*⁵⁹

Thus time and again he would not hesitate to accept that he has applied the principle of non-violence wrongly and retrace his steps.⁶⁰ He resolutely refused to be anybody's *guru*, despite many a request. For him, a *guru* meant an unerring guide and he felt that he could never be one since he himself was a seeker after Truth.⁶¹ He was conscious of many of his imperfections. Accordingly, to his biographer L. Fischer he declared in 1942: "I am very imperfect. Before you are gone you will discover a hundred of my faults, and if you don't I will help you".⁶² Hence he disliked all exaggerations of his supposed holiness which appeared to him as glorification of untruth. In a speech on February 20, 1927, he says:

*I shuddered when someone proposed that though I was silent I should exhibit myself for **darśan** [sight of a person, place or thing considered holy which makes the beholder holy and gain merit]. I assure you the words **darśan** and **Mahātma** stink in my nostrils. I am unworthy of giving **darśan**. Even like you I am a vessel of clay, liable to all the affections and passions that flesh is heir to. How can I be fit to give you **darśan**? One and only one **darśan** is necessary, that of the nameless, formless, indefinable Absolute. Try, if you can, to see Him everywhere, in a poor man's hut as in a palace, in a latrine as well as in a temple.*⁶³

In 1928, two interesting incidents occurred at the Sabarmati *āśram*, of which he wrote in his newspaper and there were many protests against him. He would rejoice and welcome all those who wrote letters against him, though he remarked that they should write to him legibly and in ink: "I claim to be a humble seeker after truth and am conducting **Navajivan** not merely to teach but also to learn".⁶⁴ The two incidents were: 1^o he had put an end to the sufferings of an ailing, incurable calf by injecting poison; 2^o he caused to be driven off, violently, a band of monkeys which was destroying

⁵⁹ CW XXXIII (1927) no. 256, p. 245-247.

⁶⁰ Cf. above, p. 106.

⁶¹ Cf. CW XXXIII (1927) no. 412, p. 406.

⁶² FISCHER, L., **Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World**, New York, 1954, p. 140.

⁶³ Speech at Sholapur on February 20, 1927, in CW XXXIII (1927) no. 101, p. 101 (parenthesis is mine).

⁶⁴ CW XXXVII (1928) no. 378, p. 339.

the fruits on the *āśram* property. His response to the abusive letters and demonstrations was one of humility and understanding:

*These good people seem to think that because I am trying to analyze and define the ideal of **ahimsā** I must have fully attained that ideal. My views regarding the calf and the monkeys seem happily to have shattered this illusion of theirs. Truth to me is infinitely dearer than the "Mahatmaship" which is purely a burden. It is my knowledge of my limitation and my nothingness which has so far saved me from the oppressiveness of the "Mahatmaship".*⁶⁵

In political life too, what he sought was above all and it was truth! Thus when he attended the Round Table Conference in London in 1931, he was asked about his purpose and he declared that his purpose in coming was:

*... to uphold truth as I see it, for I believe it is the keystone of my life. On it everything else depends. It comes first and last and always. And in all things I have always tried to do it. In my political ambitions I eschew all lies and fraud. For the attainment of no object would I subscribe to deceit. I have read many varying descriptions of myself. Some call me a saint. Others call me a rogue. I am neither the one nor the other. All that I aspire to be—and I hope I have in some measure succeeded in being—is an honest, godfearing man.*⁶⁶

Speaking at a university convocation, he declares: "What matters it, if by following truth we were to lose the whole world including even India? We shall be true votaries of truth only if we follow it to death, in the conviction that under God we will get back the things we hold dear including India".⁶⁷ Further, answering the objections that Gandhi, in 1931, by his compromise with Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, had sacrificed the country for Truth and that he was reducing his countrymen to test-tubes, he explains how he had not sacrificed the nation and even if it were so, it would not be bad:

*I have no hesitation in saying that I should, if there could be such a choice, most decidedly sacrifice the country for Truth which to me is God. I further hold that no individual or nation has ever gained by the sacrifice of Truth. There is, therefore, no such thing as sacrifice of the country for Truth. Those who join me in my experiments in Truth-seeking are not my "test-tubes", they are my valued fellow-workers, sharing with me the joys that the search for Truth brings as no other search does.*⁶⁸

65 **Young India**, November 1, 1928, in **CW XXXVII** (1928) no. 468, p. 409.

66 **The Daily Herald** (London), September 28, 1931, in **CW XLIII** (1931-1932) no. 54, p. 79.

67 **CW XXXIII** (1927) no. 22, p. 25.

68 **CW XLV** (1930-1931) no. 396, p. 340-341.

Though he would say that Truth is indefinable as God Himself is beyond definition,⁶⁹ he would yet attempt descriptions. Thus speaking to students, he connects it with purity: "Put all your knowledge, learning and scholarship in one scale and truth and purity in the other and the latter will by far outweigh the other".⁷⁰ Answering a question whether Truth and Life were same, he notes: "Truth and Life in its essence are one and same. I should give the same definition for Truth as I have given for life".⁷¹ Truth and courage also go together. Consequently, decrying the lack of courage on the part of the women at his *āśram* to own up their misdeeds, he notes: "I see lack of courage in all of them. Where there is no courage there never can be truth".⁷² Truth is permanent, indivisible and hence one has to be true always and on all occasions. This he demanded of the *satyāgrahis*:

*A satyāgrahi's vow can never be observed in parts. Truth is only one, whole and indivisible and stays as such for all time, past, present and future. Truth can be compared to an arch. If even one brick of the arch comes off, the whole arch crumbles. Because a counterfeit coin is accepted at ninety-nine shops, it does not acquire the worth to be accepted in the hundredth shop. It was a false coin from the very moment of its making — only its real test was delayed. Similarly, if a satyāgrahi is unable to pass the final test, he was never a satyāgrahi.*⁷³

Nothing would upset him so much as a failure to keep a given word. This we have already noted in both the previous stages and it continued in this stage too. A promise has to be kept. Hence, when he was told that the Harijans themselves were not very particular about temple entry which was denied to them, he would say that the question is not really that but rather the ability of the others to fulfil the promises given to the Harijans on September 25, 1932 at Bombay: "We have made a promise to admit Harijans into temples and Hindus have pledged to lay down their lives to that end, if necessary ... It is unbearable that we should break our promises to Harijans and to God. I shudder at the mere thought".⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Cf. above, p. 44.

⁷⁰ Speech, February 8, 1929, in CW XXXIX (1929) no. 28, p. 430.

⁷¹ Letter, February 11, 1929, in CW XXXIX (1929) no. 51, p. 450.

⁷² Letter, April 8, 1929, in CW XL (1929) no. 196, p. 217.

⁷³ Navajivan, July 15, 1928, in CW XXXVII (1928) no. 74, p. 61-62.

⁷⁴ CW LV (1933) no. 1, p. 2-3.

He distinguishes between Absolute Truth and relative truth. Absolute Truth is the goal, the fullness of reality, the Truth that is God while all others are relative truths. What we possess is relative truth and taking care of this we would progress towards Absolute Truth. Writing to Mirabeen on April 11, 1933, he asserts: "We shall reach the Absolute Truth, if we will faithfully and steadfastly work out the relative truth as each one of us knows it".⁷⁵ This realization that each one of us possesses relative truth enables us to be broad-minded towards others: "Truth that we see is always relative knowledge and therefore it need not have universal application. My prayer therefore for my neighbour is: 'May they see the Truth as Thou the All-knowing One, would have them see it'".⁷⁶ Such an attitude helps towards communal harmony between the adherents of different religions. Writing in his newspaper the **Harijan** on April 6, 1934, he gives two formulations of a prayer. The prayer he approved was: "O God! give all Thy creation wisdom, so that each may worship and follow Thee according to his light and grow in his own faith" and the formula he did not approve was: "O God! give Thy creation wisdom, so that each may worship and follow Thee even as I try to do".⁷⁷ Writing to someone who had asked him which religion was nearest to the Truth, he says that in spite of an understandable attachment to one's own religion, one ought to have an equal regard for all religions:

I should as a Hindu, accept it as natural for a Christian to believe that Christianity is nearer to truth and for a Muslim to believe that about Islam, and also that it is necessary for them to say so if they are to follow their respective religions sincerely. I ought to bear them no ill will for such a belief, nor should I regard their belief as mistaken ... Probably this view of mine about equality towards all religions is a new idea. If other people also have thought about the matter along similar lines, I am not aware of the fact. For me at any rate, the idea is original and it has given me the purest joy.⁷⁸

He was not pleased with the expression "tolerance for other religions" since tolerance could imply an assumption that others are inferior or even one may be tempted to adopt a patronizing attitude. He would wish rather an attitude of 'respect for all religions', whereby one accepts that all religions are

⁷⁵ CW LIV (1933) no. 426, p. 372.

⁷⁶ Letter, April 6, 1933, in CW LIV (1933) no. 360, p. 315.

⁷⁷ CW LVII (1934) no. 363, p. 354.

⁷⁸ Letter, October 30, 1932, in CW LI (1932) no. 516, p. 316-317; cf. also CW XXXVII (1928) no. 268, p. 224; no. 296, p. 255.

imperfect and humbly go towards fullness of Truth: "This admission will be readily made by a seeker of Truth, who follows the law of Love. If we had attained the full vision of Truth we would no longer be mere seekers but would have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of our imperfections".⁷⁹ To a Christian who wrote to him in prison that Gandhi had to become a Christian since belief in Christ is essential, he replies:

*Why do you think that the truth lies in believing in Jesus as you do? Again why do you think that an orthodox Hindu cannot follow out the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount? Are you sure again that you know Jesus and His teachings? I admire your zeal but I cannot congratulate you upon your wisdom. My forty-five years of prayer and meditation have not only left me without an assurance of the type you credit yourself with, but have left me humbler than ever. The answer to my prayer is clear and emphatic that God is not encased in a safe to be approached only through a little hole bored in it, but that He is open to be approached through billions of openings by those who are humble and pure of heart. I invite you to step down from your pinnacle where you have left room for none but yourself.*⁸⁰

Whereas to another Christian who had asked whether there is place for Jesus Christ in Hinduism, he replied that there is room enough "for Jesus, as there is for Mahomed, Zoroaster and Moses".⁸¹ He compares different religions to different branches of a majestic tree or different flowers of the same garden.⁸²

In conclusion, a note must be added for the benefit of any serious seeker after Truth. He must be ready to prepare himself carefully for it through proper self-control: "Entitlement and eligibility are as much essential in the case of truth as in any other. The person who wishes to see Truth

⁷⁹ Letter, September 23, 1930, in **CW LXIV** (1930) no. 239, p. 166 sq.

⁸⁰ Letter to Satyavati Chidamber, September 4, 1932, in **CW LI** (1932) no. 26, p. 21.

⁸¹ Letter to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur in **Harijan**, January 30, 1937, in **CW LXIV** (1936-1937) no. 327, p. 326.

⁸² Cf. **CW LXIV** (1936-1937) no. 327, p. 326; cf. also a discussion with an American missionary R.R. Keithahn, in **CW LXIV** (1936-1937) no. 428, p. 419-420. Gandhi was against all conversions and proselytism. There are many references: e.g. **CW XL** (1929) no. 61, p. 60; **CW LXIV** (1936-1937) no. 26, p. 18-20; no. 117, p. 98-101; no. 42, p. 35-37 and p. 39-40.

in the form of God must observe the *yamaniyamas*".⁸³ This is necessary, otherwise we are bound to lose our way since "what appears to me as truth today, may appear to be untruth after a couple of days. What is regarded as truth by a few has often been denounced by many ... Man can have a glimpse of truth only after making mistakes, stumbling on the way and treading dangerous paths".⁸⁴ So it is necessary for anyone who is seeking Truth to practise the needed asceticism. Gandhi tried it through his *āśram* vows and tried to interest others also to practise them according to their capacity, but above all, he wanted all to practise at least *ahimsā* which for him is love. Of this, we shall see in due course.

B. His concept of God at this stage

Gandhi desired with all his heart to see God face to face. All he did was geared to this ultimate end. Thus replying on July 2, 1927 to certain philosophical questions from a correspondent, he notes: "I wish to say in all humility that my fasts and other ordeals are inspired by the desire to see God face to face. I fast in order that, even if I go without food altogether, I may have a glimpse of God".⁸⁵

But What or Who is the God whom Gandhi wanted to see face to face or to catch a glimpse of? As at the previous stage, he holds that though God is beyond attributes and beyond all descriptions, these could be useful for us as means:

Saguna [with attributes], *Nirguna* [without attributes] etc. belong to the speech of human beings trying to express their imperfect knowledge. In truth God is beyond description. Even to call Him *Nirguna* is an utterly vain attempt to describe Him. Since, however, He is a slave of His devotees, he can be described not with a thousand but with infinite number of epithets, all of which can be applied to him from the point of view of the respective devotees, and it is His supreme mercy that He tolerates them all. There is no error, therefore, in saying that He exists as all bodies, all

⁸³ Harijanbandhu, October 29, 1933, in CW LVI (1933-1934) no. 178, p. 154; *Yamaniyamas* mean rules and regulations of self-control enjoined by the *śāstras* for spiritual aspirants.

⁸⁴ CW LVI (1933-1934) no. 178, p. 154.

⁸⁵ CW XXXIV (1927) no. 89, p. 94.

*sense-organs and all other things. We may thus confess our inability to describe Him.*⁸⁶

Similarly, writing around the same time (on July 13, 1927) to someone else, he notes: "God has been given a thousand names which only means that He can be called by any name and that His qualities are infinite. That is why God is also beyond nomenclature and free from attributes".⁸⁷ Because God is beyond attributes, He could even be described (as has been done in Indian philosophy) with contradictory attributes. This only makes us realize that we could never succeed in capturing Him totally within the categories of attributes. Accordingly, he notes during one of his discourses on the *Gītā*: "Almighty God is Doer and Non-Doer, Enjoyer and Non-Enjoyer, both. He is indescribable, beyond the power of human speech. Man somehow strives to have a glimpse of Him and in so doing invests Him with diverse and even contradictory attributes".⁸⁸ Similarly, in a letter to a correspondent, he declares: "Being beyond attributes God deserves to be called even by seemingly contradictory epithets such as 'without attributes', 'full of good qualities', 'immutable', 'ever changing', etc.". ⁸⁹ Consequently, in Gandhi's view, it appears that it is man who attributes from his own viewpoint and God the Object (sometimes considered as Subject in Indian philosophy) of attribution is all that and far beyond all that. Hence, he is able to accept anything and everything said about God because He is beyond all!

God is the First Cause. Writing to a certain correspondent who had begun to doubt the existence of God due to reading a book, he says:

*If you will admit the fact of your having parents, how can you escape the fundamental fact of the First Cause? Having made sure of that First Cause God or some other thing ... But if you do not believe in the First Cause, there is no hope. For to whom should you pray then? Therefore hold fast to your belief in God, never mind the reasoning.*⁹⁰

In his newspaper **Young India**, dated October 11, 1928, he answers a series of questions on God's existence and the problem of evil. He calls God as the

⁸⁶ CW XXXIV (1927) no. 89, p. 94-95 (parentheses are mine).

⁸⁷ CW XXXIV (1927) no. 141, p. 163.

⁸⁸ Discourse no. 5, in CW XLI (1929) no. 84, p. 117.

⁸⁹ CW XLI (1929) no. 283, p. 329.

⁹⁰ Letter, April 8, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 247, p. 209.

"indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything. It is the unseen Power which makes Itself felt and yet defies all proof, because It is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses".⁹¹ And from the contrast with death, untruth and darkness, he calls God as Life, Truth and Light: "I see It as purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth, truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is supreme God".⁹² He also argues that God is omnipotent, immanent and hence omniscient. Thus writing in his **History of Satyagraha Ashram**, he notes:

*But who is God? God is not some person outside ourselves or away from the universe. He pervades everything, and is omniscient as well as omnipotent. He does not need any praise or petitions. Being immanent in all beings, He hears everything and reads our innermost thoughts. He abides in our hearts and is nearer to us than the nails are to the fingers.*⁹³

If God were so close to us and in us, what would 'seeing God' mean? He says: "Seeing God means realization of the fact that God abides in one's heart",⁹⁴ and prayers said aloud are means of shaking off one's torpor to become aware of God within.⁹⁵ We are accustomed to hear of man being made in the image of God. Gandhi would think of it in the reverse direction also. Hence, speaking at Harihar on August 13, 1927, he explains:

*It is said that if God made man in His image, man made God in his own, and it is no wonder that what we see in our temples, at the present day, are lifeless images of us, lifeless devotees. If we would make them living images of God, we must transform our lives, we must end our communal squabbles, and we must befriend the oppressed, and live pure lives.*⁹⁶

The basis of such a thinking is also a certain way of thinking not uncommon to Indian philosophy. Accordingly, when asked whether he believed in the distinct existence of the 'Trinity' —Nature, Soul and God, he replies: "I do

⁹¹ CW XXXVII (1928) no. 389, p. 348.

⁹² CW XXXVII (1928) no. 389, p. 349. (One can notice here a reflection of the traditional **Gāyatri Mantra**).

⁹³ CW L (1932) no. 206, p. 203.

⁹⁴ CW L (1932) no. 206, p. 211.

⁹⁵ CW L (1932) no. 206, p. 203.

⁹⁶ CW XXXIV (1927) no. 312, p. 339.

believe but the word distinct sticks in my throat, for though the three are separate in name, they are one in Substance ... Soul seems to be many; but underneath the seeming variety, there is an essential oneness".⁹⁷ Replying to the poet-sage Rabindranath Tagore, who had protested against Gandhi's imputing of the tragedy of Bihar's earthquake in 1934 to sins of untouchability, he would insist that God's laws work in nature in a mysterious way and in fact God and His Law are identical: "He and His Law are one. The Law is God. Anything attributed to Him is not a mere attribute. He is the Attribute. He is Truth, Love and a million things that human ingenuity can name".⁹⁸

From all these considerations, he is able to understand and accept with equanimity all the different perceptions and descriptions of God. Thus speaking to Christian missionaries at Bangalore on July 29, 1927, he asserts:

*... the contents of the richest word —God— are not the same to everyone of us. they will vary with the experience of each. They will mean one thing to the Santhāl [one of the Indian tribes] and another to his next door neighbour Ravindranath Tagore [poet-sage of Bengal]. The Sanātani [orthodox-Hindu] may reject my interpretation of God and Hinduism. But God Himself is a long suffering God who puts up with any amount of abuse and misinterpretations.*⁹⁹

He is able to justify the different anthropomorphisms present in Hinduism. Writing in his **History of the Satyagraha Ashram**, he describes how he had not hesitated to use *ślōkas* (Sanskrit verses) in *āśram* prayers which described the goddess *Sarasvati* as seated on a lotus with a *vīṇa* (a kind of stringed musical instrument) in her hands or the god *Ganeś* who has a big belly and an elephant's head. And to an *āśramite* who had questioned him about such a violence done to truth, he replied:

I claim to be a votary of truth, and yet I do not mind reciting these verses or teaching them to the children ... Sarasvati and Ganesha are not independent entities. They are all descriptive names of one God. Devoted poets have given a local habitation and a name to His countless attributes. They have done nothing wrong. Such verses deceive neither the worshippers nor others. When a human being praises God he imagines Him to be such as he thinks fit. The God of his imagination is there for him. Even when we pray to a God devoid of form and attributes we do in fact endow Him with attributes. And attributes too are form. Fundamentally God is

⁹⁷ CW XXXIV (1927) no. 264, p. 289-290.

⁹⁸ CW LVII (1934) no. 170, p. 165.

⁹⁹ CW XXXIV (1927) no. 230, p. 260-261 (parentheses are mine).

indescribable in words. We mortals must of necessity depend upon the imagination which makes and sometimes mars us too. The qualities we attribute to God with the purest of motives are true for us but fundamentally false, because all attempts at describing Him must be unsuccessful. I am intellectually conscious of this and still I cannot help dwelling upon the attributes of God. My intellect can exercise no influence over my heart. I am prepared to admit that my heart is weak and hankers after a God with attributes. The *ślōkas* which I have been reciting every day for the past fifteen years give me peace and hold good for me ...¹⁰⁰

Similarly, writing to Mirabehn alias Miss Slade, an English *āśramite*, he explains how one could better understand the references to gods and goddesses in the *āśram* prayers:

... you will find every virtue personified and made a living reality instead of a dead dictionary word. These imaginary gods are more real than the so-called real things we perceive with our five senses. When I recite this verse, for instance, I never think that I am addressing an imaginary picture. The recitation is a mystical act. That when I analyze the act intellectually, I know that the goddess is an imaginary being, does not in any way affect the value of the recitation at prayer time.¹⁰¹

This is a typical Indian way of thinking. Reality is mysterious, indescribable and one does not reach out to it by any cold, rational thinking but rather through a certain rapport with reality. This rapport involves a realization of one's deep down ontological communion with reality. Such a realization comes through the heart, either in contemplation (*gñāna*) or devotional attachment (*bhakti*) to a particular manifestation of a deity which attracts an individual. Sometimes this realization could come when one has entered into the rhythm (*ṛta*) of reality through *yōgic* endeavours. Gandhi's own favourite form for worshipping God was *Rāma* and, speaking at a conference of the Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland, held at London during the Round Table Conference of 1931, he defends his own form of worship and compares it with the Christian:

I feel I adore the same Father though in a different form. I may not adore him as "God". To me that name makes no appeal, but when I think of Him as Rāma, He thrills me. To think of God as "God" does not fire me as the name Rāma does. There is all the poetry in it. I know that my forefathers have known him as Rāma. They have been uplifted for Rāma, and when I take the name of Rāma, I arise with the same energy. It would not be possible for me to use the name "God" as it is written in the Bible. It is contrary to experience. I should not be attracted. I should not be uplifted to the

¹⁰⁰ CW L (1932) no. 206, p. 200-201.

¹⁰¹ Letter, January 14/18, 1931 (from prison), in CW XLV (1930-1931) no. 134, p. 98.

truth. Therefore my whole soul rejects the teaching that **Rāma** is not my God.¹⁰²

It is interesting to observe that originally **Rāma** and **Kṛṣṇa** were legendary heroes. But then transposed, one goes beyond the personages of history and legend. Thus Gandhi makes this transition and defends the practice of this form of worship and compares it with the Christ-image:

*You think I am such a fool as to worship **Rāma** and **Kṛṣṇa** who existed ages ago? I worship **Rāma** and **Kṛṣṇa** who exist today, who have existed for all time, who know my innermost thoughts and who continually correct me. If I were not sure of my **Rāma** and **Kṛṣṇa**, existing on both sides of me, I should have gone made ...*

and drawing a parallel with the Risen Christ, he adds:

*Let me tell you that Christians worship the Christ who was resurrected. In the same manner those who worship **Rāma** and **Kṛṣṇa** worship **Rāma** and **Kṛṣṇa** who are more living than I am. They live now and live until eternity.¹⁰³*

He also used the expression **Rāmarājya** (literally: rule or kingdom of **Rāma**) to denote the legendary kingdom of peace, justice and prosperity established by **Rāma**. Quite rightly it was misunderstood by the Muslims to mean the establishment of a future Hindu kingdom in independent India and so they protested. He quickly explained:

*I warn my Mussalman friends against misunderstanding me in my use of the word **Rāmarājya**. By **Rāmarājya** I do not mean Hindu **Rāj** [kingdom/rule]. I mean by **Rāmarājya** Divine **Rāj**, the kingdom of God. For me **Rāma** and **Rahīm** are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of Truth and righteousness. whether the **Rāma** of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of **Rāmarājya** is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure.¹⁰⁴*

During his imprisonment at Yeravda (1932-1933), he became interested in astronomy, read books on it and took to watching the skies, marvel-

¹⁰² CW XLVIII (1931-1932) no. 100, p. 127.

¹⁰³ **Harijan**, July 4, 1936, in CW LXIII (1936) no. 49, p. 45. Cf. also speech on *Ramanavami* (feast in connection with **Rāma**'s birthday), March 30, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 190, p. 164-165.

¹⁰⁴ CW XLI (1929) no. 319, p. 374 (parenthesis is mine). **Rahīm** (compassion) is one of the attributes of Allah and used substantively in Muslim parlance.

ling at God's handiwork. He speaks enthusiastically and poetically about it. Thus in an interview to the **Associated Press** on March 28, 1933, he says:

*It is a wonderful subject [astronomy], and more than anything else impresses upon me the mystery of God and the majesty of the universe. To be lying on your back in the open air on a starry night and regarding universe after universe in the immeasurable expanse, you cannot help becoming a worshipper of God. My mind leaps with joy as I do so. Oh, it is marvellous.*¹⁰⁵

We must mention here his attraction for the Poverello of Assisi, St. Francis who seemed to be a kindred spirit in the attitude towards all material things: renouncing and yet rejoicing in all things. He had read a book **Flowers of St. Francis**, and had a few passages annotated therein.¹⁰⁶ He admired the non-violence of St. Francis who would not kill even a violent animal,¹⁰⁷ and writing to his nephew Narandas Gandhi, he asks him to explain to the *āśram* women about St. Francis.¹⁰⁸ A congregation of Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, whom he calls larks of St. Francis, seems to have been writing to him from Italy quite often.¹⁰⁹ No wonder then, that he would discover and appreciate God's providence in the way He looks after His creatures. Thus he speaks of "... I saw God in a worm and a weevil".¹¹⁰ The reference is to an incident in the prison. He was given dates to eat and found a worm and a weevil in them. He removed them and gave them to his secretary to put away but the secretary had placed them in a basin. So Gandhi did not use the basin at first but later absent-mindedly used it and then he realized what he had done. To his joy, however, he discovered that before he had used the basin, the tiny creatures had moved away and were happily moving about at a distance. Similarly, God could be found even in the lowliest task and object. Writing to his son Ramdas, he remarks:

I suppose Surendra is busily occupied with his shoëmaking. Tell him that God may be found even in shoes and the leather of dead cattle. The leather

¹⁰⁵ **CW** LIV (1933) no. 260, p. 235-236.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. letter, September 4, 1932, in **CW** LI (1932) no. 29, p. 22 and **CW** LI (1932) no. 655, p. 424-425.

¹⁰⁷ **History of Satyagraha Ashram**, ch. III, in **CW** L (1932) no. 206, p. 206.

¹⁰⁸ Letter around August 15, 1932, in **CW** L (1932) no. 383, p. 371.

¹⁰⁹ "... Italian Sisters, the Larks of St. Francis", in **CW** LIII (1933) no. 20, p. 25.

¹¹⁰ **CW** XLV (1930-1931) no. 25, p. 20.

*of the soles which I received was excellent. I see in it God in a beautiful form. He is not to be found only in Scriptures.*¹¹¹

In his characteristic way of speaking, he had declared that in some Hindu temples God was present only as much as he was in brothels! This statement met with quite a justified criticism but in an interview to the press at Bombay, he defended himself well:

*I am not prepared to withdraw a single word of what I said. In a way, it is the truth. God is omnipresent. He is present in thieves' dens, in toddy shops and in brothels. But to worship God we do not go to these places. For this purpose we look for a temple, trusting that the atmosphere there will be pure. I say that in this sense God does not dwell in some of the temples. Or if He does, it is only as much as in a brothel.*¹¹²

In his *āśram*, he did not have a temple but the inmates gathered in the open. For him, it symbolized the best way to worship the invisible, limitless God; an openness and invitation to all, belonging to any caste or creed to come for worship and it was also a reflection on the poverty of the masses who could not afford a house of their own. He resisted all suggestions to put up a prayer hall or temple at the *āśram*. Thus writing to Mirabeau he explains:

*Ours is, you should remember, a somewhat original attempt. We have no solemn-looking building for prayer. We have simply the open space. But it is a sound thing especially as we represent the famishing millions. For us the sky must be an all-sufficing roof and the four directions our limitless walls ... if we are to break through all bonds of race, class and creed, we can have but the openness of house of prayer.*¹¹³

Gandhi was able to discover God's will in the various events of his life in a simple and trusting manner. Even small everyday occurrence could make him acknowledge God's way of acting. Thus before a public meeting at Ramnad it had rained heavily but then the skies cleared before the open-air meeting could begin and he noted in the course of his speech on July 30, 1927:

Truly God is great. And if we have eyes to see we can see His greatness from moment to moment ... I am humble enough to recognize the greatness of God in events as they march past us and make themselves accommodating to us. And we should be humble enough not to quarrel with

¹¹¹ Letter, October 26, 1932, in CW LI (1932) no. 491, p. 300.

¹¹² *Aaj*, October 31, 1927, in CW XXV (1927-1928) no. 132, p. 203-204.

¹¹³ Letter, July 14, 1930, in CW XLIV (1930) no. 30, p. 20.

*God or think that He is not great enough when events seem to go wrong and everything seems to go wrong and everything seems to be in our way.*¹¹⁴

Even unexpected sorrows and reversals need not upset one's equanimity. He was very much saddened by the death of his nephew Maganlal Gandhi, who was the prop and mainstay of his Sabarmati āśram. Replying to a condolence message, he observes:

*Yes Maganlal's death is a heavy blow, if I am to consider this to be a God-less universe and we a purposeless creation; but when I realize that the hand of God is in everything, the grief itself turns to joy and gives me zest for greater service, greater dedication.*¹¹⁵

He acknowledges that it is difficult for us to understand fully God's way. Thus after the Bihar earthquake of 1934, he reflects during a speech on March 27, 1934:

*The conviction is growing upon me day after day that human intellect is incapable of fully understanding God's ways. God in His wisdom has circumscribed man's vision, and rightly too, for, otherwise man's conceit would know no bounds. But whilst I believe that God's ways cannot be comprehended fully by man, I have firm faith that not a leaf falls without His will, and not a leaf falls but it subserves His purpose.*¹¹⁶

One has therefore to wait patiently and strive carefully to discover God's will. Consequently, he notes in a letter on May 22, 1927: "... it is necessary ever to wait upon God and find out what His will is. I have found this to be a most difficult, though very agreeable task".¹¹⁷ He counsels another one to stop worrying and to rely on God's providence:

*You should stop worrying unnecessarily. God does the worrying for us; why then should we worry? Even if we worry, what can we do? We realize every moment in our lives that we cannot move a single leaf unless He wills. Why, then, should we feel proud, or worry?*¹¹⁸

He had learnt the art of waiting upon God's will and reading it in the concrete changing situation. So he says he never has any elaborate plans. Ac-

¹¹⁴ *The Hindu*, December 2, 1927, in *CW XXV* (1927-1928) no. 234, p. 349.

¹¹⁵ Letter to Anne Marie Peterson, May 11, 1928, in *CW XXXVI* (1928) no. 364, p. 307.

¹¹⁶ Speech at Chopra, reported in *Harijan*, April 6, 1934, in *CW LVII* (1934) no. 334, p. 318.

¹¹⁷ Letter to Isabel Bamlet, May 22, 1927, in *CW XXXII* (1927) no. 364, p. 352.

¹¹⁸ Letter to Prabhavati (wife of Jayaprakash Narayan, a nationalist leader with socialistic leanings), July 6, 1931, in *CW XLII* (1931) no. 134, p. 112.

cordingly, in an interview to two foreigners on August 8, 1936, when he was asked whether he would come out of his political retirement to lead the people if needed, he replied: "That depends upon God. I never decide beforehand but wait for the contingency to decide. Planning ahead for myself, even for a few years, is opposed to my principles".¹¹⁹ To discover the will of God, prayer is a means. Prayer, in this context, is not employed to change God's will but rather for the individual to understand and be reconciled. In this way, replying to a sub-judge who had undergone many misfortunes and who wondered whether all these were not due to his own sins and what he could do as an expiation, Gandhi clarifies:

*God is never powerless. But His laws are immutable. We do not know them. Nor do we know His will at a given moment. Therefore we adopt within bounds such remedies as may commend themselves to us. Prayer is to the God within. It does not provoke God to change His will but it enables us to know His Will which is everything.*¹²⁰

He was well aware that without God's assistance, all our efforts would be in vain. He wished for the combined assistance of all the communities, i.e. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsees, Jews and all other Indians, but above all, he felt God's assistance was essential: "I know too that all this combined assistance is worthless if I have not one other assistance, that is, from God. All is vain without His help. And if He is with this struggle, no other help is necessary".¹²¹ While preparing for the Round Table Conference to be held in London, he declares his own utter reliance on God:

*I must go to London with God as my only guide. He is a jealous Lord. He will allow no one to share His authority. One has therefore to appear before Him in all one's weakness, empty-handed and in a spirit of full surrender, and then He enables you to stand before a whole world and protects you from all harm.*¹²²

But this does not mean that one is absolved from effort. Earlier, he had clearly asserted that for a *satyāgrahi* self-purification and self-sacrifice (and thus strenuous effort) are necessary:

¹¹⁹ CW LXIII (1936) no. 258, p. 208.

¹²⁰ Letter to Pyare Lal Govil, November 19, 1930, in CW XLIV (1930) no. 454, p. 325.

¹²¹ Navajivan, March 30, 1930, in CW XLIII (1930) no. 126, p. 125.

¹²² Young India, September 3, 1931, in CW XLVII (1931) no. 430, p. 368-369.

*A satyāgrahi has no power he can call his own. All the power he may seem to possess is from and of God ... Without the help of God he is lame, blind, groping. Ever since 1921, I have been reiterating two words, "self-purification" and "self-sacrifice". God will not assist him without these two. The world is touched by sacrifice. It does not discriminate about the merits of the case. Not so God. He is all-seeing. He insists on the purity of the cause and an adequate sacrifice therefor.*¹²³

Similarly, writing to a former inmate of his āśram, he notes: "Not a leaf can stir without God's grace, but we cannot dispense with human effort either, which is the means through which God's grace works".¹²⁴

He was also conscious that wisdom consists in realizing that we are as instruments in God's hands. Thus he reminds the people at the end of the successful *satyāgraha* struggle at Bardoli:

*For a satyāgrahi nothing can be truer than to say that no one but God is to be thanked and praised for the triumph of Bardoli satyāgraha. Indeed we say no more. But I know that that is not going to give satisfaction, for the conviction has not yet gone home to us that we are but instruments in His hand and He uses us as He wills. We have not yet learnt the virtue of surrender to God.*¹²⁵

Nothing could be so false or dangerous as to glory in oneself and forget God. Thus speaking at a Young Men's Christian Association gathering on September 10, 1927, he remarks how a certain learned and upright gentleman in England, who appreciated Gandhi's works but not his frequent mention of God in his newspaper *Young India*, wrote expostulating with him about this and also how a young Indian, who wrote to Gandhi frequently, wondered at Gandhi's mentioning God so many times in his writings and speeches. Gandhi, commenting on these, says:

But both consider that all that counts in this world and all that is required is self-effort, nothing more, nothing less. As against this, I can only say that at least 40 years' experience of conscious and unbroken striving shows to me that whilst self-effort is an absolute necessity, by itself it is an illusory thing. Without the living grace of the living God, all that effort is reduced to dust. I know instances of very dear friends of mine who were able by self-effort, as it appeared to them, to build themselves up, but they found, and I noticed, that because the effort was not touched by this living grace, they had become in an instant a living sepulchre. Before they knew

¹²³ CW XLIII (1930) no. 126, p. 126.

¹²⁴ Letter to Prembehñ Kantak, December 16, 1934, in CW LX (1934-1935) no. 1, p. 2.

¹²⁵ Speech at Surat on August 12, 1928, *Young India*, August 16, 1928, in CW XXXVII (1928) no. 203, p. 169.

*where they were, subtle temptations surrounded them and they found themselves totally unprepared to resist them.*¹²⁶

Gandhi considered himself an instrument in God's hands and was not afraid of even mistakes he may commit in his tasks because even these unconscious mistakes could be turned to good account by God. Accordingly, on the way to the Round Table Conference, he notes in a letter:

*... I think and feel that it is God within who is moving me and using me as His instrument. He will give me the right word at the right moment. That does not mean that I shall make no mistakes. But I have come to believe that God as it were purposely makes us commit mistakes if only to humble us. I know this is a dangerous belief which can be utilized to justify any error. But I have no doubt about its correctness in respect of all unconscious errors.*¹²⁷

Regarding the 'still small voice', which we mentioned in the previous stage,¹²⁸ he tries to clarify further and gropes for ways of expressing it when he is questioned. In the previous stage, he had spoken of it as voice of conscience, voice of God, an inner voice. To a question from a correspondent who had asked how Gandhi could act according to the dictates of a supposed inner voice while he believed that Truth is God, he replies on May 25, 1932:

*There is nothing wrong in this matter in believing whatever one's heart accepts, as no man has perfect knowledge of God nor can he express whatever little knowledge he has. It is true that I do not depend upon my intellect to decide upon any action. For me **the reasoned course of action is held in check subject to the sanction of the inner voice.** I do not know if others would call it the mysterious power or whatever. I have never deliberated upon this nor analyzed it; I have felt no need of doing so either. I have faith, and knowledge, too, that a Power exists beyond reasoning. This suffices me. **I am unable to clarify this any further as I know nothing more in the matter.***¹²⁹

So then, it is not totally unreasoned. It is a sanctioning Power. This shows that Gandhi was in the habit of processing all serious matters before the court of his conscience and only when this court had sanctioned, his action would follow and that with firmness. A few months later, after his histori-

¹²⁶ Speech at Cuddalore, September 10, 1927, *The Hindu*, September 12, 1927, in *CW XXXIV* (1927) no. 431, p. 507-508.

¹²⁷ Letter to C. Rajagopalachari, August 28, 1931, in *CW XLVII* (1931) no. 433, p. 372.

¹²⁸ Cf. above, ch. II, p. 47-48.

¹²⁹ *Young India*, May 25, 1932, in *CW XLIX* (1932) no. 586, p. 482 (emphases are mine).

cal fast in connection with the reservation of seats for the untouchables, he states:

*You must try to listen to the inner voice, but if you won't have the expression "inner voice", you may use the expression "dictates of reason" which you should try to obey ... I would also submit that it is not everyone claiming to act on the urge of the inner voice who has that urge. After all like every other faculty this faculty for listening to the still, small voice within requires previous effort and training perhaps much greater than what is required for any other faculty ...*¹³⁰

Note well that he speaks of it not as a dictate of conscience, but "dictates of reason", which confirms the process we mentioned above. Writing at about the same time to his friend C.F. Andrews and about the same matter since C.F. Andrews seems to have asked him whether there would not have been a possibility of error in the matter:

*... for me personally, it transcends reason, because I feel it to be a clear call from God. My position is that there is nothing just now that I am doing of my own accord. He guides me from moment to moment. This is a thing which you cannot make other people believe, and it would be quite proper for them to reject such a testimony. That has happened before now. That which is claimed as the voice of God proved to be the prompting of the devil. What it is in my case will be partly judged by results and partly after my death, never wholly in any case and at any time except by God. After all, the intention behind the act is the final criterion, and that God alone can know, not even the author of the intention.*¹³¹

Here again is the further confirmation of the process, but a further claim that it is God who inspires the final decision. However, we find an interesting and somewhat mysterious, mystical experience portrayed in the account of how he came to undertake the 21 day purificatory fast in May 1933. He describes:

*The night I got the inspiration, I had a terrible inner struggle. My mind was restless. I could see no way. What I did hear was a voice from afar and yet quite near. It was unmistakable as some human voice definitely speaking to me and irresistible. I was not dreaming at the time I heard the voice. The hearing of the Voice was preceded by a terrific struggle within me. Suddenly the Voice came upon me. I listened, made certain that it was the Voice, and the struggle ceased. I was calm.*¹³²

¹³⁰ CW LII (1932-1933) no. 92, p. 71 (emphasis is mine).

¹³¹ CW LII (1932-1933) no. 324, p. 244-245 (emphases are mine).

¹³² Harijan, July 8, 1933, in CW LV (1933) no. 305, p. 255.

It is surprising that this tallies with some of the rules of discernment in Christian spirituality, whereby the calm that is reached after a decision could be a sign of the correct decision. He further affirms that this voice was the voice of God:

*But I can say this —that not the unanimous verdict of the whole world against me could shake me from the belief that what I heard was the true voice of God ... For me the voice was more real than my own existence. It has never failed me, and for that matter anyone else.*¹³³

Regarding the process we had mentioned above, we get an additional note a year and a half later. During a talk with one Mary Chesley around December 15, 1934, he was asked whether he believed that this guidance comes from subconscious reason or from God. He replied: "From God —but subconscious reasoning may be the voice of God. Often, after seeing the way I consciously reason out why that is the best way".¹³⁴ So then it appears that normally he collects the data (of this he was always very careful and meticulous), weighs the pros and cons of the issue before the court of conscience and listening to the voice of conscience, comes to a decision and after the decision, he searches for all the cogent reasons to present to others why the decision has to be that and not any other.

At the conclusion of this section, we could summarize the whole in a few sentences. Gandhi was an earnest seeker after Truth. This Truth, for him, was God. He preferred this expression to the previous that "God is Truth" because God was the Ultimate Being (*Sat*), Reality and that was His very nature, whereas in the expression "God is Truth", Truth appeared as an attribute. When one is truthful in his life, he approaches this Truth-God. Hence Gandhi's whole life was based on this truthfulness which he tried to inculcate in the life of the nation. Obviously every falsehood is against it. Not only the breaking of the promises but also various social evils such as untouchability, drunkenness, Hindu-Muslim quarrels were all parts of falsehood and have to be given up. Truth that is God could also be described in various other ways as Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Immanent, Light, Life. In fact, 'It' could even be described in apparently contradictory terms which

¹³³ CW LV (1933) no. 305, p. 256; cf. also CW LV (1933) no. 71, p. 76, his description of the same, on the following day of the experience, to Sardar Vallabhai Patel, who was in the same prison cell with him.

¹³⁴ CW LIX (1934) Appendix, p. 459.

only shows the inadequacy of all terms to exhaust fully a description of God. In this way, he is able to accept any and every description according to different religions. Love for all religions is not a loss nor love for one's own is thereby diminished. God's providence rules our life and we could discover Him in all His creatures both great and small. His working is seen in every event in this world. His will rules our own lives. With His grace, we do all that is good and the voice of conscience is a good guide to discover what is the will of God. Thus his love for God is on a firm footing. The Truth he seeks is the Truth he loves and wishes to serve till the end. His was a lively faith in a living God. Consequently, speaking to Christian missionaries in Bangalore, he says:

I may suggest that God did not bear the cross only 1,900 years ago, but He bears it today, and He dies and is resurrected from day to day. It would be poor comfort to the world if it had to depend upon a historical God who died 2,000 years ago. Do not then preach the God of history, but show Him as He lives today through you.¹³⁵

III. A genuine concern for other as an integral part of a search for Truth-God

Gandhi located his search for Truth-God in the humble, lowly, poor and oppressed. He realized ever more that this search for Truth-God cannot be accomplished without a care and concern for others expressed through humble service. "My spiritual seeking, whether or not original, has always been in the form of social service. Such service is an *integral part of the quest for truth*".¹³⁶ Such a service has to be selfless: "Selfless service is the secret of life".¹³⁷ This selfless service is to be rendered to all regardless of caste, creed or sex and must be whole-hearted and thus it would result in a discovery of God:

Whatever I have been doing is done with a sense of duty to God. And this I consider to be the right thing. God is not seated in the skies, in the heavens, or elsewhere. He is enshrined in the hearts of everyone —be he a Hindu, Mohamedan, Christian or Jew, man or woman. I consider that

¹³⁵ Speech, July 29, 1927, in *CW XXXIV* (1927) no. 230, p. 261.

¹³⁶ Letter to Puratan Buch, March 21, 1932, in *CW XLIX* (1932) no. 265, p. 223 (emphasis is mine).

¹³⁷ Letter to Narandas Gandhi, May 16, 1932, in *CW XLIX* (1932) no. 545, p. 450.

*real service of the country and of God consists in serving the poor humanity ... Such service however must be whole-hearted.*¹³⁸

Much later, he says that he worships Truth-God through service to the dumb millions:

*I claim to know my millions. All the 24 hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and last, because I recognize no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions.*¹³⁹

Once it was reported that some gullible women were duped into worshipping a false holy man in Bengal, who later proved to be immoral. Gandhi, commenting on it, said that instead of searching for God in such supposed holy men, it would be better to search for Him in the suffering:

*... how and where should man, who has physical form, to worship God? He is omnipresent. Hence the best and most understandable place where He can be worshipped is a living creature. The service of the distressed, the crippled and the helpless among living things constitute worship of God.*¹⁴⁰

To one who was confused and somewhat inclined to give up social service and withdraw into a contemplative life, he writes in a philosophical vein: "You can no more run away from men than you can from your own body. Wherever you go, embodied life will haunt you. Embodied being can only see the Being through embodied life".¹⁴¹ Who could engage himself in service? Does it need special qualifications? Replying to such questions he declared:

*No man is too insignificant for rendering personal service to those who may be in distress. The art does not need previous training. The ability to give effective help resides in every human being who has the will and the necessary courage.*¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Speech to the students at Mysore, **The Hindu**, July 21, 1927, in **CW XXXIV** (1927) no. 171, p. 204.

¹³⁹ Press Statement at the end of his fast in Rajkot, March 7, 1939, in **CW LXIX** (1939) no. 38, p. 33.

¹⁴⁰ **Navajivan**, May 6, 1928, in **CW XXXVI** (1928) no. 351, p. 296.

¹⁴¹ Letter to Khursedbehn Naoroji, October 8, 1937, in **CW LXVI** (1937-1938) no. 252, p. 209 (a grand-daughter of the famous Indian nationalist leader Dadabai Naoroji, reputedly the Grand Old man of India).

¹⁴² **Harijan**, October 14, 1933, in **CW LVI** (1933-1934) no. 101, p. 91.

A. The basis for this service is human solidarity

The essential oneness of all reality is a basic concept in Indian thought. Gandhi also uses this basic concept to express his penchant for a life of service to all. As in the previous stage, during this stage too, this enables him to get into action. He had solved already the problem of the need for action according to the principles of the *Gītā*.¹⁴³ The action was: self-less service to all without attachment of any kind to the fruits thereof. The emphasis, however, is on service. Thus answering a question "what should be the prime aim and duty of man in life?", he says in *Hindi Navajivan*, August 15, 1929:

*The aim of man in his life is self-realization. The one and only means of attaining this is to spend one's life in serving humanity in a true altruistic spirit and lose oneself in this and realize the oneness of life.*¹⁴⁴

So the ultimate aim is this realization of fundamental oneness and the means is service. Here note that the means proposed is the special emphasis of Gandhi, while the aim is a normal Indian aspiration. Also compare this with the answer he gives to a Christian audience. During his visit to London in connection with the Round Table Conference, he was invited to speak at Guild House Church on September 23, 1931, and was asked this question: "Why should we serve our fellow beings?" and he answered:

*In order that we may see a glimpse of God through them; because they have got the same spirit as we have, and unless we learn that, there is a barrier drawn between God and ourselves; if we want to demolish that barrier, the beginning is made by complete identification with our fellow beings.*¹⁴⁵

Here the ultimate aim is union with God and this union is not achieved without union with our fellowmen. Observe also carefully the difference be-

¹⁴³ We have mentioned *Gītā* earlier on (cf. ch. I, p. 31, footnote 101). Here it remains for us to mention very briefly about the typical Indian dilemma: action or no action. For action (*kriya*) meant necessary consequence of action (*karma*) and the resultant birth and rebirth in accordance with *karma*. So every action leads to its inexorable consequence and to be ever wandering from birth to birth is no rest and no final bliss (*mōkṣa*). *Gītā* suggests a means of escape. Action is necessary. I cannot do without it but the consequence can be avoided if the action is *niṣkāmakarma*, i.e. without (*niṣ*) desire (*kāma*) or attachment to the fruits (= deeds done without attachment to the fruits thereof). Thus one who performs all his actions in this fashion reaches *mōkṣa*.

¹⁴⁴ *Hindi Navajivan*, August 15, 1929, in CW XLI (1929) no. 232, p. 291 (emphasis is mine).

¹⁴⁵ CW XLVIII (1931-1932) no. 33, p. 58.

tween the Indian question and the European. The Indian is worried about how to reach the end *he knows* and is seeking the means, while the European has the means and does not know the end, probably because he had made the means an end! This may sound as an oversimplification but I hope this would become clearer when we reach our final chapter. Gandhi considers that the message of the **Vēdas** (account of divine revelation [*śruti*] contained in ancient Sanskrit verses) is also about the realization of such oneness of beings and the means is service to the lowly. Thus speaking to the students of an Indian university, he notes on February 16, 1934:

You may read books, but they cannot carry you far. Real education consists in drawing the best out of yourselves. What better book can there be than to go, day in day out, to Harijan quarters and to regard Harijans as members of one human family? It would be uplifting, ennobling study. Mine is no narrow creed. It is one of realizing the essential brotherhood of man. To my mind, the message of the Vēdas is unity of God and unity of all life in one God.¹⁴⁶

All these do not mean a denial of diversity but a transcending of outward diversity to realize the essential oneness. This he considers is the aim not only of **Vēdas** but of all religions. Speaking at a public meeting, he declares:

Diversity there certainly is in the world, but it means neither inequality nor untouchability. An elephant and an ant are dissimilar. Nevertheless God has said that they are equal in his eyes. The inner oneness pervades all life. The forms are many, but the informing spirit is one. How can there be room for distinctions of high and low where there is this all-embracing fundamental unity underlying the outward diversity? For that is a fact meeting you at every step in daily life. The final goal of all religions is to realize this essential oneness.¹⁴⁷

He wanted even children to realize this oneness, at least in realizing their oneness with other children in poorer circumstances. In a message to Bombay children who were going to celebrate his 60th anniversary, he advises:

The children who live and study in Bombay ought to know that they are but a drop in the ocean of crores of children in India. Also they must realize that a large number of these crores of Indian children are only living skeletons. If the Bombay children look upon them as their brothers and sisters, what are they going to do for them?¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Speech at Annamalai University, Chidambaram, in **CW LVIII** (1934) no. 174, p. 170.

¹⁴⁷ Speech at a public meeting, Mandla on December 6, 1933, **Harijan**, December 12, 1933, in **CW LVI** (1933-1934) no. 327, p. 304-305.

¹⁴⁸ **Bombay Chronicles**, October 2, 1929, in **CW XLI** (1929) no. 360, p. 414.

As in the previous stage, here too he continues to stress that because we are one with all reality, our actions good or bad affect all others. Not only actions but even our thoughts can affect others and hence the need for good thoughts:

*The world is not separate from us nor we from the world. All are connected with one another in their inmost essence and the actions of each have effect on all others. Actions here include thoughts also. Hence not a single thought is without its effect. That is why we must cultivate the habit of thinking good thoughts.*¹⁴⁹

He felt that his own fasts were spiritual acts and they cannot but have a good repercussion in the world. He was quite certain about it:

*... The silent and invisible effect of all spiritual acts are far deeper and far more pervasive than their felt and visible effects ... That such is the result of spiritual acts is not a matter of conjecture, but provable under given conditions like any other tangible result.*¹⁵⁰

He was warned by some that he should try to keep out ambitious and self-seeking workers from the Harijan cause. Gandhi replied that he had undertaken the 21 days' purificatory fast precisely for this intention and had even desired that there be a chain of such fasters because "the vicarious penance of the comparatively pure is needed to bring about a change in the hearts ...".¹⁵¹ Similarly, writing to a certain Bal Kalelkar on August 12, 1927, he pleads with him that he should not disturb the resolve of Kakasaheb, a former *āśramite* to live a life of self-restraint. The motive given is that if Kakasaheb succeeds and progresses, it would help society at large. In the letter, Gandhi has underlined the following words: "*I believe that the religion of non-violence springs from the fact that the advancement of one promotes the advancement of all, and the fall of one implies the fall of all*".¹⁵² He also considers that the imperfections of his co-workers and *āśramites* is due to his own faults: "I cannot forget that the imperfection of the *āśram* is a faithful reflection of my own imperfection".¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Letter to Purushottam Gandhi, April 18, 1932, in **CW XLIX** (1932) no. 401, p. 328.

¹⁵⁰ Letter to C.Y. Chintamani, January 1, 1933, in **CW LII** (1932-1933) no. 433, p. 329.

¹⁵¹ **Harijan**, November 24, 1933, in **CW LVI** (1933-1934) no. 290, p. 271.

¹⁵² **CW XXXIV** (1927) no. 308, p. 334.

¹⁵³ Letter to Narandas Gandhi, May 5, 1933, in **CW LV** (1933) no. 120, p. 113.

The concepts of basic oneness and solidarity with all, leads him to consider inter-dependence as a natural consequence and even a virtue to be practised:

*Man is as independent as he is dependent. And he must be so in order that he may be able to preserve his humility. If he can be visualized as a totally independent being, he will cease to be a social animal and if, in turn, he ceases to be that, he will cease to be non-violent and will be unable to achieve a sense of unity with all living beings.*¹⁵⁴

One of his co-workers had written to him that we should use only indigenous dyes for *khādi* cloth, otherwise middlemen would take advantage of our dependence on foreign dyes. Gandhi was not convinced. He commented on it thus:

*Interdependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency. Man is a social being. Without inter-relation with society he cannot realize his oneness with the universe or suppress his egoism. His social interdependence enables him to test his faith and prove himself on the touchstone of reality. If man were so placed or could place himself as to be absolutely above all dependence on his fellow-beings he would become so proud and arrogant as to be a veritable burden and nuisance to the world.*¹⁵⁵

This understanding of interdependence enables him to explain his position on the caste system. He was not against the four-fold orthodox classification of society (*Brāhmins* as those engaged in learning and intellectual pursuits; *Kṣatriyas* as those who protected the society as warriors; *Vaiśyas* as those engaged in trade and finally the *Śūdras* as farmers and labourers). However, he would not see any high and low among these; rather, he would wish that they are considered as equal and interdependent for the good of society.¹⁵⁶ He was not for the destruction of the system but for the removal of all burdensome additions as sub-castes, prohibitions of social communion and consideration of high and low. He would also include all the so-called out-castes and untouchables into the broad fourth division of society, i.e. *Śūdras* (servants of society) and say that in a way all of us, as engaged in ser-

¹⁵⁴ *Navajivan*, September 1, 1929, in *CW XLI* (1929) no. 293, p. 345.

¹⁵⁵ *CW XL* (1929) no. 22, p. 23 sq.; cf. also *CW XL* (1929) no. 224, p. 241.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Young India*, September 29, 1927, in *CW XXXV* (1927-1928) no. 1, p. 1 sq. For him, it meant a practical measure of good economics: "It does not mean grades at all. It is not a vertical division. It is a horizontal one ... is a mighty economic law" (*The Hindu*, December 18, 1933, in *CW LVI* (1933-1934) no. 371, p. 346].

vice participate in this fourth division.¹⁵⁷ Previously he had upheld the position that though untouchability is to be removed, prohibitions of inter-marriage and inter-dining need not be disturbed. But, at this stage, he gave up defending even these and left them to individual taste and preference.

As in the previous stage, in this one too, he would stress on spinning as an activity which makes one feel one with the poor. His All-India Spinners' Association had imposed a regular monthly contribution of spun yarn, representing 30 minutes of daily 'sacrificial spinning', as he called it. Many who had voluntarily undertaken this obligation were in default. So, Gandhi writing in *Young India* on August 11, 1927, reminds them of their duty and tells them that it is a precious time of reminding oneself of one's solidarity with the poor of the land:

*Let them remember that apart from the intrinsic value of spinning, there is no less value in cultivating regularly a daily remembrance of the condition of the dumb millions and a daily concentration over drawing an even stronger thread as much for themselves as for the rest of the 300 millions of India.*¹⁵⁸

Writing to a correspondent, he encourages him to continue his personal spinning as a renewal of 'our daily bond' with the starving millions.¹⁵⁹

Gandhi also felt that all his service was not restricted to one group or several groups but it was ordained to the service of the country and through the country to the service of the whole world: "For me service of India is identical with the service of humanity",¹⁶⁰ and similarly he notes in a private letter that his *āśram* was meant for the service of all: "The *āśram* exists not only for the service of the country but through it, for the service of the world and to help us to attain *mōkṣa*, to see God, through such service".¹⁶¹ This universalism and solidarity with all nations he expresses aptly in an-

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Young India*, June 4, 1931, in *CW* XLVI (1931) no. 382, p. 302; cf. also Letter to Kasi-nath Trivedi, November 22, 1930, in *CW* XLIV (1930) no. 460, p. 328.

¹⁵⁸ *CW* XXXIV (1927) no. 296, p. 320.

¹⁵⁹ Letter to Dr. Kailasnath Katju on September 1, 1927, in *CW* XXXIV (1927) no. 395, p. 434.

¹⁶⁰ Statement to the Associated Press on August 29, 1931 (on the way to London to attend the Round Table Conference), in *CW* XLVII (1931) no. 445, p. 384. Also cf. speech to students on November 9, 1933, *The Hindu*, November 17, 1933, in *CW* LVI (1933-1934) no. 225, p. 204.

¹⁶¹ Letter to Premabehn Kankar on January 25, 1932, in *CW* XLIX (1932) no. 56, p. 38.

other letter on May 2, 1935: "Love has no boundary. My nationalism includes the love of all nations of the earth irrespective of creed".¹⁶²

B. The basis for this service is human dignity

During this stage, the problem of the untouchables continued to draw his attention and took various shapes. In 1927, he was trying to find a suitable term to describe the untouchables since existing words such as *Antyājas* (last born), *Dhed*, *Bhangi* (dirt sweeper) were not liked. He began using, for a short while, the term *dalit* (suppressed):

*From now on, we shall describe Antyājas too as dalit. The term was first used by Swāmi Shraddānand. Swāmi Vivēkānanda chose an English word having the same meaning. He described the untouchables not as "depressed" but as "suppressed" and quite rightly. They became, and remain, what they are because they were suppressed by the so-called upper castes.*¹⁶³

And the message for the National Week, 1928 contained his protests against such a suppression by caste Hindus. He warns them that it was a sin and demeans both the suppressed and the suppressors:

*No man takes another down a pit without descending into it himself and sinning in the bargain. It is not the suppressed that sin. It is the suppressor who has to answer for his crime against those whom he suppresses.*¹⁶⁴

After his historic fast on behalf of the untouchables he was searching for a newer name since even the word *dalit* (suppressed) was not liked:

*... Now it seems that name also is not liked. The real explanation is that as long as the poison of untouchability exists in our society any name that may be given will probably come to be disliked after some time.*¹⁶⁵

Yet, he invited the readers to suggest another name and from among the suggestions received, he chose one suggested by a certain Jagannath Desai from Rajkot. The word was *Harijanā* (*Hari* meaning God and *janā* meaning people).

¹⁶² Letter to an unknown American, in CW LXI (1935) no. 42, p. 27.

¹⁶³ Navajivan, March 27, 1927, in CW XXXIII (1927) no. 197, p. 196.

¹⁶⁴ Young India, March 29, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 180, p. 153-154.

¹⁶⁵ Navajivan, June 7, 1931, in CW XLVI (1931) no. 428, p. 342-343.

... The word is not new, but a beautiful one already used by the father of Gujarati poetry (Narasinha Mehta). Moreover, as used by him, the word **Harijanā** can also mean men of God who are abandoned by society ... **Antyāja** brethren would lovingly accept that name and try to cultivate the virtues which it connotes.¹⁶⁶

Just as Gandhi had predicted about the futility of changing names without changing the attitudes, even this name soon lost its appeal (though it is still used). Answering to the objection by the Punjab Students' Union, he explains his helplessness about names:

*The only question therefore is what name to distinguish the so-called untouchables by; and "Harijans" was the name suggested by some of them, and as it was a name that exactly fitted the condition, I adopted it; for, those who are forsaken by mankind to become the chosen of God, and "Harijan" literally means that.*¹⁶⁷

Leaving the problem of the proper term apart, he would try to rouse the conscience of the caste Hindus to realize the indignity to which they were submitting the untouchables:

*How can I tolerate that Harijans get water from the same trough from which dogs and cattle drink water? ... The caste Hindus are so arrogant that they do not permit the Harijans to go near the wells at all. Even when they give water, they do so from a distance and with words of abuse. You and I ought not to tolerate such a thing.*¹⁶⁸

He considered this as a desire for exploitation:

*... my settled conviction is that modern untouchability is an inhuman institution having its root in selfishness and the desire for exploitation of fellow-beings found to be amenable to suppression.*¹⁶⁹

And he makes his demand that such a suppression be ended by law: "Nothing will satisfy me till the last vestige of untouchability is gone. I would therefore insist on a statutory declaration that all public places of worship, wells, schools, etc. should be open to the suppressed precisely on the same terms as the suppressors".¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ CW LXVII (1931) no. 275, p. 245; cf. also CW LIII (1933) no. 6, p. 8.

¹⁶⁷ Letter, January 23, 1933, in CW LIII (1933) no. 162, p. 122; cf. also CW LIII (1933) no. 504, p. 374-375.

¹⁶⁸ **Harijanbandhu**, December 24, 1933, in CW LVI (1933-1934) no. 357, p. 331.

¹⁶⁹ **Harijan**, December 29, 1933, in CW LVI (1933-1934) no. 429, p. 412.

¹⁷⁰ CW LI (1932) no. 173, p. 111-112.

He realized that this whole question of untouchables comes about due to a feeling of supposed superiority and he would condemn it in the strongest terms possible. He declares categorically:

*I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All — whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever — have the same soul as any other. It is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves.*¹⁷¹

This superiority and inferiority has to be removed completely: "Removal of untouchability does not mean root-and-branch destruction of the idea of superiority and inferiority. He who says, 'I am more than my fellow' debases himself; he who says, 'I am the least among my fellows' raises himself'.¹⁷² He also realized that the removal of untouchability depended much on the cooperation of women. Hence while speaking to them, giving religious motives, he pleaded for its removal. Speaking to women in Madras on December 12, 1933, he counsels:

*Forget altogether that some are high and some are low. Forget altogether that some are touchables and some are untouchables. I know that you all believe in God as I do, and God cannot be so cruel and unjust as to make distinctions of high and low between man and man and woman and woman.*¹⁷³

During a speech on the same day to a different audience, he argues:

*There can be, in God's eyes, no distinction between man and man even as there is no distinction between animal and animal. Had God designed one part of humanity to be lower than the other, He would have put some distinguishing mark upon some part of our bodies whereby these distinctions could have been unmistakably seen, felt and demonstrated.*¹⁷⁴

Thus he would not hesitate to identify himself with the untouchables: "If you will not resent my saying it, I would like to say that I am a 'touchable' by birth, I am an 'untouchable' by choice".¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ *Young India*, September 29, 1927, in *CW XXXV* (1927-1928) no. 1, p. 1 sq.

¹⁷² *CW LI* (1932) no. 337, p. 199.

¹⁷³ *The Hindu*, December 21, 1933, in *CW LVI* (1933-1934) no. 387, p. 360; cf. also speech to women in Delhi, in *CW LVI* (1933-1934) no. 358, p. 332-333.

¹⁷⁴ *CW LVI* (1933-1934) no. 390, p. 365.

¹⁷⁵ Letter to Rajbhoj, September 20, 1932, in *CW LI* (1932) no. 173, p. 111; cf. also *CW LI* (1932) no. 179, p. 117.

In his dealing with the British authorities, he always stood for the national dignity and self-respect. Even at one stage, he had been advocating dominion status but he qualified it in his own cryptic style "within the empire if possible, without if necessary" because he did not want the future generations to be tied down; nor did he suffer anything to be thrust down the throat of unwilling people. Human dignity could not tolerate that! Thus he would not cringe and beg from the British:

*It is more correct and more dignified to own that there is no change of heart [on behalf of the British] because we are weak. Nature abhors weakness. We want from the British people and the world at large not mercy but justice that is our due. And justice will come when it is deserved by our being and feeling strong.*¹⁷⁶

When in 1931, he was going to sign an accord with the Viceroy Lord Irwin, someone warned him not to be taken in and Gandhi responded by saying that he would not make peace without dignity and safety for the nation.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, he did not want the English to lose their dignity either. He feared that while the Indian people voluntarily underwent all sufferings and miseries inflicted on them by the British authorities, they (the British) would in the process become brutalized and thus lose their human dignity and how could he tolerate that, for "... we are all sons of the same God and partake of the same divine essence".¹⁷⁸ During the Round Table Conference (1931) in London, the conference wanted to give suffrage on the basis of wealth or literacy. Gandhi would want that the basis should be human dignity and not wealth or literacy and hence he stood for adult suffrage:

I cannot possibly bear the idea that a man who has got wealth should have the vote, but that a man who has got character, but no wealth or literacy, should have no vote; or that a man who works honestly by the sweat of his brow day in day out should not have the vote for the crime of being a poor man. It is an unbearable thing; and having lived and mixed with the poorest of the villagers, and having prided myself on being considered an untouchable, I know that some of the finest specimens of humanity are to

¹⁷⁶ **Young India**, January 13, 1927, in **CW XXXII** (1926-1927) no. 241, p. 552 (parenthesis is mine).

¹⁷⁷ Letter to Prabhasankar Pattani (February 16, 1931), in **CW XLV** (1930-1931) no. 255, p. 180-181.

¹⁷⁸ Speech at the Indian Students' Association meeting at London on October 13, 1931, **Young India**, October 29, 1931, in **CW XLVIII** (1931-1932) no. 113, p. 145-146.

*be found amongst these poorer people, amongst the very untouchables themselves.*¹⁷⁹

This human dignity and honour which Gandhi wanted to uphold at all times is to be maintained not only against attacks from the English but also their Indian counterparts. Hence, during the Bardoli *satyāgraha* in 1928, he counsels the people:

*Let each one of you when the hour comes defend the citadel of his honour with his last breath, for that is the meaning of swarāj. The substitution of a brown for a white bureaucracy won't bring us swarāj. Swarāj will come to us only when we have developed the capacity to safeguard our honour.*¹⁸⁰

He had a very lofty idea of human freedom, flowing from the dignity of man. Thus in an interview to **The Hindu** on May 28, 1942, he declares: "... my conception of freedom is no narrow conception. It is co-extensive with the freedom of man in all his majesty".¹⁸¹

The respect of human dignity and honour led him to emphasize freedom, even the freedom to make mistakes. He, himself acknowledged many of his mistakes but each mistake showed him the path since he always considered himself to be an experimenter with truth seeking the ultimate Truth-God. Thus he answers with mixed humour to a question by an interviewer "What do you mean by freedom?", he answers: "I want the freedom to make mistakes, and freedom to unmake them, and freedom to grow to my full height and freedom to stumble also. I do not want crutches".¹⁸² He would also good-naturedly allow those who differed from him to remain in their own position if they could not accept his reasoned arguments. Thus writing to someone who pestered him with correspondence trying to interest Gandhi in his projects which Gandhi could not accept:

I want you therefore to recognize the fundamental difference between us and love me in spite of the difference if you can. For my part, the existence of that difference does not prevent me from loving you and therefore writing to you as often as I can in reply to your communications and striving to make clear the differences between our temperaments so that we may

¹⁷⁹ Speech on September 17, 1931, in **CW XLVIII** (1931-1932) no. 16, p. 30-31.

¹⁸⁰ Speech at Sarbhon in **The Bombay Chronicle**, August 7, 1928, in **CW XXXVII** (1928) no. 162, p. 132.

¹⁸¹ **CW LXXVI** (1942) no. 193, p. 163.

¹⁸² Interview to Alice Schalek on March 20, 1928, in **CW XXXVI** (1928) no. 149, p. 127.

*quickly agree to differ, and hope that one or the other will become a convert.*¹⁸³

He had his own peculiar view about minority opinions. He normally preferred a negotiated consensus in matters of industrial disputes and advocated it even in politics. Consequently, when he had brought in a resolution that Congress members should be habitual *khādi* wearers, the resolution obtained a majority but the minority had spoken strongly. So Gandhi said:

*I have always held that when a respectable minority objects to any rule of conduct, it would be dignified for the majority, and would conduce to the good of the congress, for the majority to yield to the minority. Numerical strength savours of violence when it acts in total disregard of any strongly-felt opinion of the minority. The rule of majority is perfectly sound, only where there is no rigid insistence on the part of the dissenters upon their dissent, and where there is on their behalf a sportsmanlike obedience to the opinion of the majority.*¹⁸⁴

We can notice here the predominant note of love and concern for all. On another occasion, the reverse took place. Gandhi's resolution was thrown out by the majority and he accepted it gracefully and commented later in his newspaper *Navajivan*, June 26, 1931:

*Though I am often described as an autocrat, I consider myself a man who accepts the supremacy of the people's voice; it is in my nature to give in to the **panch** [a group of five elders who act as judges in a village assembly]. **Panch** means the voice of the people. I therefore, accepted the resolution passed by the majority. There is an exception to this rule. We cannot give in to anyone on a question of principle. But there are not many principles in life. One who at every step refuses, in the name of principle, to listen to others is autocratic and selfish. Questions of principle arise only rarely.*¹⁸⁵

At the end of this section, we can note in summary that, for Gandhi, seeking Truth-God meant seeking 'It' in humble, energetic, genuine service to all, especially the suppressed. The basis of such service to the lowly is the fundamental oneness of all reality. Besides whatever he had stressed in the previous stage, here he realizes the truth of interdependence and the coordination that must be in society in spite of diversity. The oneness of all reality is not to forget the human dignity and honour due to each one. There is

¹⁸³ CW XXXV (1927-1928) no. 265, p. 382; cf. also CW XLVII (1931) no. 314, p. 285, where he notes the freedom to express one's opinion unfettered by those who may hold a contrary view.

¹⁸⁴ *Young India*, June 9, 1927, in CW XXXIII (1927) no. 469, p. 457-458.

¹⁸⁵ CW XLVII (1931) Addenda no. 1, p. 423 (parenthesis is mine).

not to be a consideration of high and low among human beings. Each deserves his honour. Endowed with freedom, each one is entitled to his opinion and freely cooperates to work in the upliftment of society. In this way we reach to the oneness of reality, the Truth which is God.

IV. The means for prosecuting this search for Truth-God

A. Life of prayer as means in the search for Truth-God

At this stage, he continues to stress the importance of prayer in one's life both as an individual and a member of the human society. However, explicit references to prayer becomes rare in his writings after 1935. The reason seems to be the mounting correspondence, of which he began to complain. In his correspondence, he paid attention to public matters and the serious political problems that confronted him and the nation. The articles in his newspapers dealt with socio-political issues. The private, informal spiritual guidance he used to be giving to many correspondents diminished. All these do not mean that there was any lessening of his interest in prayer and prayer life. He did pray every day and attended community prayers at the *āśram* and held prayer meetings wherever he stayed. Thus, speaking at a prayer meeting in Bombay on May 22, 1935, he reflects on the situation of despair that seemed to have gripped the nation, which had not yet achieved independence in spite of the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience, both of which had been given up for the time being (Gandhi had just then withdrawn from the Congress):

... strength is not to be obtained by taking up arms or similar means. It is to be had by throwing oneself on His name. Rāma is but a synonym of God. You may say God or Allah or whatever other name you like, but the moment you trust naught but Him, you are strong, all disappointment disappears ... Even in darkest despair, when there seems no helper and no comfort in the wide world, His name inspires us with strength and puts all doubts and despair to flight. The sky may be overcast today with clouds, but a fervent prayer to Him is enough to dispel them. It is because of prayer that I have known no disappointment ... I know all that is happening about me, and if anyone must give way to despair, it should be I. But I have not known despair.¹⁸⁶

Much earlier,¹⁸⁷ he had been asked a question as to how one could get rid of cowardice, become courageous, intelligent and a man of action. In reply,

¹⁸⁶ CW LXI (1935) no. 126, p. 89 (emphasis is mine).

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Young India*, December 20, 1928.

Gandhi declares: "I can give my own testimony and say that a heartfelt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming cowardice".¹⁸⁸ He goes on to explain how in the past 40 years he had his own share of disappointments, uttermost darkness, near despair and yet had not lost faith due to engaging himself in humble prayer, surrendering himself completely to God and the result had been wonderful: "And when man thus loses himself, he immediately finds himself in the service of all that lives. It becomes his delight and his recreation. He is a new man never weary of spending himself in the service of God's creation".¹⁸⁹ Kathiawari youth had become enraged at Gandhi's restraining them from protesting against their native ruler and they were confused at Gandhi's inactivity in getting justice done. Gandhi tells them that one must be patient and wait prayerfully till the opportunity comes. He cites his own example:

*For years together in South Africa my efforts consisted practically only in waiting and prayer, and it is my firm conviction that that period of silent prayer was the most fruitful for that work. It constituted the bedrock on which whatever little was accomplished was based ... Even so in the matter of the Indian States I am always on the look-out for an opportunity. Opportunities have always come to me for the waiting and praying.*¹⁹⁰

During 1927, thieves began prowling round the Sabarmati āśram at night. The women became frightened. Gandhi, writing to them, asks them to be courageous. Such fearlessness can come through faith in God and faith could be developed through prayer:

*The river is ever ready to give water to all. But if one does not approach it with a pot in which to fetch water, or avoid it thinking its water poisonous, how can that be the fault of the river? Fear is the lack of faith. But faith cannot be developed by means of reasoning. It comes gradually through reflection, meditation and practice.*¹⁹¹

On board the S.S. Rajputana, which was taking him to the London Round Table Conference in 1931, he was asked by a Muslim youth to speak about prayer, not a discourse on prayer but to give a personal testimony of prayer. Gandhi obliged him and spoke of how there was a time in his life

¹⁸⁸ CW XXXVIII (1928-1929) no. 315, p. 247-248.

¹⁸⁹ CW XXXVIII (1928-1929) no. 315, p. 248.

¹⁹⁰ *Young India*, August 29, 1929, in CW XLI (1929) no. 274, p. 321.

¹⁹¹ CW XXXIII (1927) no. 344, p. 333.

when he could not pray though he had attended Christian prayer services in South Africa. It was only later that as faith in God grew, his yearning for prayer had increased correspondingly, so much so that he could go without food but not without prayer and one cannot have a surfeit of prayer. His own prayer, he said, enabled him to have a peace which many envied. He concluded by saying that he was indifferent as to the form of prayer which could vary from person to person.¹⁹² However, he could not agree with those who said that their whole life is prayer and consequently neglected their daily prayer. For him, daily prayer was a daily renewal of loyalty to God:

*Let us not make the astounding claim that our whole life is a prayer, and therefore we need not sit down at a particular hour to pray. Even men who were all their time with the Infinite did not make such a claim. Their lives were a continuous prayer and yet for our sake, let us say, they offered prayer at set hours, and renewed each day the oath of loyalty to God.*¹⁹³

Speaking at a prayer meeting in Sabarmati āśram, he tells them that our prayer must be heart-felt and not merely a repetition of words: "It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without heart".¹⁹⁴ And he goes on to describe the effects of such a prayer:

*The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the world, the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable ... prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts.*¹⁹⁵

And he concludes with a remark about the form of prayer: "Do not worry about the form of prayer. Let it be any form, it should be such as can put us into communion with the divine".¹⁹⁶ Gandhi had, by this time, begun to make a prayer of all his thinking. In a letter to his secretary Mahadev Desai, he notes: "... I never take a single step without thinking carefully ... my thinking nowadays takes the form exclusively of prayer. I do not use my

¹⁹² *Young India*, September 24, 1931, in *CW XLVII* (1931) no. 461, p. 394.

¹⁹³ *CW XLVII* (1931) no. 469, p. 399.

¹⁹⁴ *CW XLII* (1929-1930) no. 389, p. 411-412.

¹⁹⁵ *CW XLII* (1928-1930) no. 389, p. 413.

¹⁹⁶ *CW XLII* (1928-1930) no. 389, p. 412.

reason, but look into my heart".¹⁹⁷ For private prayer, he considered the morning time as ideal. Advising a lady, he writes:

*If you succeed in keeping early hours of the morning, I have no doubt that they will give you peace and a joy which are not to be had in any other manner, provided, of course, that the very first thing done in the morning is to put oneself in tune with the Infinite. It is like putting oneself with perfect confidence in one's mother's lap.*¹⁹⁸

Besides private, individual prayer, Gandhi paid attention to common prayer with the community. He realized that this was part of the social dimension of prayer. In August 1927, he was convalescing at Bangalore and held congregational prayer every evening, at which many participated. During the last such gathering, he spoke thus:

*And I tell you why I ask you to continue this congregational prayer. Man is both an individual and a social being. As an individual he may have his prayer during all the waking hours, but as a member of society he has to join in the congregational prayer. I for one may tell you that when I am alone I do have my prayer, but I do feel very lonely without a congregation to share the prayer with me. I knew and even now know very few of you, but the fact that I had the evening prayer with you was enough for me ...*¹⁹⁹

It did not matter if the participants happen to be distracted, the efforts must be there to keep concentration. Writing to Mirabehn who had complained that many at the āśram were distracted in prayer and their external comportment was not what it should be, he was sympathetic towards the āśramites and notes:

*The value of prayer dawned upon me very late in life and as I have a fair capacity for imposing discipline upon myself, I have by patient and painful striving been able now for some years to conform to the outward form. But do I conform to the spirit? My answer is: No. Whilst it is true that life could be insipid for me without the prayer, I am not absorbed in the message of prayer at the prayer times. The mind wanders wither it would in spite of incessant striving ... Knowing my own weakness, I sympathize with theirs, and hope that if I grow, they must grow with me.*²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Letter, April 25, 1930, in CW XLIII (1930) no. 322, p. 321. Cf. here what we said earlier in the previous section, p. 130-132, where we described the inner voice and Gandhi's process of decision-taking)

¹⁹⁸ Letter to Mrs L.C. Unni, February 8, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 13, p. 13.

¹⁹⁹ Speech on August 28, 1927, in **Young India**, September 8, 1927, in CW XXXIV (1927) no. 382, p. 418.

²⁰⁰ Letter, July 29, 1927, in CW XXXIV (1927) no. 172, p. 205; cf. also letter to Mrs E. Bjerrum, a missionary who had complained about āśram prayer sessions, in CW XXXV (1927-1928) no. 361, p. 305.

He was faithful to these congregational prayers. At a students' meeting towards the end of 1927, he mentions how it was the common practice at the Sabarmati āśram to pray daily in the morning at 4:15 and in the evening at 7:00. They had made it a rule that even when one is away from the āśram, he should keep to the time or at least do so before retiring to bed. On a certain day, during the tour, he had forgotten and felt very bad about it and had decided that they should make a penance each time prayer was missed. On that particular day, he had been travelling in the car at 7:00 p.m. and had prayed but then wished also to pray along with them and with that he led the congregation of students in prayer.²⁰¹ Thus prayer also became for him a means of doing good to all and enabling all to become conscious of his Truth-God.

Regarding the efficacy of prayers offered for others, he had his own curious position. Obviously, he reasoned with himself that prayer could not possibly alter God's Will or Law or Nature but its effect was there both on those who pray and those for whom they pray. Commenting on the prayer offered for the recovery of his friend Romain Rolland and his subsequent recovery, he writes to Mirabeau: "I do not know that these prayers add a single second to the life prayed for. But they elevate those who pray and comfort those for whom the prayers are offered. The comfort has the appearance of prolongation of life".²⁰² He also describes his own practice in response to requests for prayer. Thus replying to his frequent correspondent from abroad, Princess Efy Aristarchi, he notes:

*My response therefore to requests from friends for intercessory prayers consists simply in there and then silently commending them to God. I do not know that this would be considered at all an adequate response. But I can truthfully do no otherwise. Prayer to God with me has a different meaning perhaps from the ordinary. He needs no asking. He reads our hearts even as we do not read them. He anticipates our demands and wishes. He knows what is good for us much better than we do. He has no hesitation in summarily rejecting our wishes and desires which in His estimation are unlawful.*²⁰³

For Gandhi, as in the previous stage, now too, fasting was an important aspect of prayer but this fasting is not only an abstinence from food and

²⁰¹ Speech at Behrampur on December 10, 1927, in *CW XXXV* (1927-1928) no. 242, p. 360.

²⁰² Letter, January 1, 1931, in *CW XLV* (1930-1931) no. 110, p. 82.

²⁰³ Letter, April 13, 1933, in *CW LIV* (1933) no. 445, p. 390.

drink, it included the control of all the senses. So, writing to Mirabeen, he notes: "The expression 'there is no prayer without fasting', is thoroughly sound. Here fasting has to be of the widest character possible. Fasting of the body has to be accompanied by fasting of all the senses".²⁰⁴ Writing to another, he agrees with him that fasting is a prayer and designed to change the hearts of people:

*I entirely agree with you that the hearts of people can only be changed by prayer, but my own experience and the experience of innumerable people shows that there is no intense prayer without fasting. My fasts have been in the past, as I hope they will be in the future, if they have to come, an expression of intense prayer.*²⁰⁵

But above all these, Gandhi considers that selfless service is essential to prove the genuineness of prayer. If prayer life does not result in a greater selfless service, then it is, to say the least, suspect: "... for me selfless service is contemplation and meditation, whereas the so-called meditation may be self-indulgence".²⁰⁶

B. Life of simplicity, dedication and service as means for this search

Gautama Buddha had analyzed the root cause of suffering and came to the conclusion that it is desire which leads one to be born again and again to fulfil one's unfulfilled desires and thus be bogged down in bodily existence and consequent suffering. He advocated his eightfold path (*aṣṭāṅgikamārga*) of right speech, right thought, right intention, etc. all of which are rooted in and turned towards the self. Gandhi's analysis takes a deviation from this opinion in a dramatic way. He sees embodiment as not for fulfilment of pleasure consequent on desire but rather for renunciation and the resultant purification which is achieved by a radical turning away from self through selfless service which would result in *mōkṣa*:

We thus arrive at the idea of total renunciation and learn the use of the body for the purpose of service as long as it exists, so much so that service, and not bread, becomes the staff of life. We eat and drink, sleep and wake

²⁰⁴ Letter, January 26, 1933, in CW LIII (1933) no. 205, p. 152.

²⁰⁵ Letter to Krishnamurthi, February 5, 1933, in CW LIII (1933) no. 325, p. 234.

²⁰⁶ Letter to Satyendranath Ganguli, March 25, 1933, in CW LIV (1933) no. 214, p. 195.

*for service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness and the beatific vision in the fullness of time.*²⁰⁷

He is also in opposition to the doctrine of 'struggle for existence' which is only a law of the brute: "Man's triumph will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service. The law of the brute will be replaced by the law of man".²⁰⁸ Similarly, speaking in an interview to Christian students, he declares: "... service which has not the slightest touch of self in itself is the highest religion".²⁰⁹ Responding to a missionary as to the best way of preaching Christ in India, he insists that it has to be through a life of silent service and simplicity and not by preaching with words:

*To live the Gospel is the most effective way —most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Preaching jars on me and makes no appeal to me, and I get suspicious of missionaries who preach. But I love those who never preach but live the life according to their lights. Their lives are silent yet most effective testimonies. Therefore I cannot say what to preach, but I can say that a life of service and uttermost simplicity is the best preaching. If, therefore, you go on serving people ask them also to serve, they would understand ... A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon. If it had human understanding and if it could engage a number of preachers, the preachers would not be able to sell more roses than the fragrance itself could do. The fragrance of religious and spiritual life is much finer and subtler than that of the rose.*²¹⁰

Here we have also the secret of Gandhi's own unconscious attraction which made the people of India attached to him. It was not so much what he said but what he did and stood for through his simple, selfless life. Though he was constantly pampered by the rich who tried to make him comfortable, he never ceased to reflect on the anomaly of the life of the rich in India. Consequently, speaking at a *zamīndars'* (rich land-owners who paid a fixed amount to the government as revenue out of their large revenue collections) meeting, he narrates an incident:

In Bengal some years ago I was the guest of a zamīndar who served me my milk and fruit in gold bowls and plates. The good host naturally

²⁰⁷ CW XLIV (1930) no. 150, p. 104.

²⁰⁸ *Harijan*, June 29, 1935, in CW LXI (1935) no. 306, p. 212.

²⁰⁹ Interview around May 21, 1935, in CW LXI (1935) no. 120, p. 81.

²¹⁰ Interview around March 22, 1925, *Harijan*, March 29, 1935, in CW LX (1934-1935) no. 434, p. 323.

*thought that he was doing me the greatest honour by placing before me his costliest plate. He could not know what was passing through my mind. "Where did he get these golden plates from?", I was asking myself, and the answer I got was: "from the substance of the ryots [peasant-tenants]". How then could I reconcile myself to those costly luxuries? I would not mind your using gold plates provided your tenants were comfortable enough to afford silver plates, but where their life is one long-drawn-out agony, how dare you have these luxuries?*²¹¹

We have also an account of an interesting dialogue between Gandhi and the organizers at one of the Harijan camps in Delhi around December 29, 1934. Gandhi was angered by the costly arrangements made for him instead of providing him with a simple hut.²¹² Even in the matter of care for one's health and use of remedies for illness, he wished to have what ordinary poor people could afford:

*... That we must take some care is true. But men of trust will not do violence to their own nature and go out of their way to take precautions and adopt remedies which ordinary men have no means to command. The formula therefore is the less care the better and no more than the least of us can procure by reasonable effort.*²¹³

As in the previous stage, here too he would stress the minimizing of needs in order to cultivate a simple life. Thus commenting on a news item that crimes against infants and immorality among minors was on the increase in the West, he warns his countrymen against falling into the same predicament. His analysis of the causes is characteristic:

*The distinguishing characteristic of the modern civilization is an indefinite multiplicity of human wants. The characteristic of ancient civilization is an imperative restriction upon and a strict regulating of those wants. The modern or western insatiableness arises really from want of a living faith in a future state and therefore of Divinity. The restraint of ancient or Eastern civilization arises from a belief, often in spite of ourselves, in a future state and the existence of a Divine Power.*²¹⁴

Similarly, he continued to insist on his *āśramites* not keeping with them unnecessary things, which action he considered to be theft and against the

²¹¹ Speech on May 23, 1931, in *CW XLVI* (1931) no. 236, p. 204 (parenthesis is mine).

²¹² *Harijan*, January 11, 1935, in *CW LX* (1934-1935) no. 47, p. 35-36.

²¹³ Letter to Mirabeen, October 24, 1927, in *CW XXXV* (1927-1928) no. 115, p. 178-179.

²¹⁴ *Young India*, June 2, 1927, in *CW XXXIII* (1927) no. 423, p. 417-418.

āśram vows.²¹⁵ At the same time, he encourages a certain Shankaran who had given up his lucrative job to make his sacrifice complete by reducing his wants still further and engage himself fully in service:

*You have reduced yourself to comparative poverty by throwing overboard your job. Surely, you are the richer for it. And if your personal wants are still further reduced, you would be richer again. It is better that a man gives the whole of himself than that he must retain a part for himself and a part for society. And when a man reduces his wants to nil, he has given away his whole self.*²¹⁶

Renunciation of material goods and reduction of wants are not by themselves an end but only means for greater readiness for service. They are not to result in any sort of laziness, feigning humility but they have to lead us to the genuine imitation of God in his ceaseless activity of doing good to all:

*Inertia must not be mistaken for humility, as it has been in Hinduism. Because it has been so mistaken, lethargy and hypocrisy have often flourished in its name. True humility means most strenuous and constant endeavour entirely directed towards the service of humanity. God is continuously in action without resting a single moment. If we would serve Him or become one with Him, our activity must be as unwearied as His. There may be momentary rest in store for the drop which is separated from the ocean, but not for the drop in the ocean, which knows no rest. The same is the case with ourselves. As soon as we become one with the ocean, in the shape of God, there is no more rest for us, nor indeed do we need rest any longer. Our very sleep is action. For we sleep with the thought of God in our hearts. This restlessness constitutes true rest. This never ceasing agitation holds the key to peace ineffable.*²¹⁷

He would not want that service be rendered to the poor with a condescending spirit. On one occasion, he found the volunteers shouting and pushing about the poor villagers. He reacted sharply:

... volunteers must become true servants. Their service should be sincere and silent. The poor and the helpless must be served. Hundreds are willing to serve famous leaders who are pestered with excessive and unceasing attention; but very few come forward to serve the poor; and of those few, many consider that they are doing the poor a great favour by serving them. The truth is that he who serves the poor discharges a small part of his debt. India's poor die of hunger, they have become helpless, and of all this misery, we the middle class people are the cause. The volunteers too belong to this class. It is we who have sustained ourselves by sitting on

²¹⁵ Letter to Narandas Gandhi, August 19, 1930, in CW XLIV (1930) no. 131, p. 90; also cf. CW XLIV (1930) no. 150, p. 130; also note what we said about this in connection with the previous stage, cf. above, ch. II, p. 68.

²¹⁶ Letter, June 20, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 507, p. 434-435.

²¹⁷ Letter to Narandas Gandhi, October 7, 1930, in CW XLIV (1930) no. 289, p. 206.

*their backs so long and are doing so even today ... Therefore, no volunteer should think even in his dream that when he serves the village folk courteously, respectfully and sincerely, he is doing anyone a favour.*²¹⁸

He was also surprised at the hankering after office by congressmen. Reflecting on a situation in the Sind Provincial Congress, where there was danger of a division, he writes to the President, Swami Govindanand, who was engineering to be re-elected:

*Why do you want office when the office does not want you? The narrow majority by which you may be able to retain office can bring no real satisfaction, can give you no real opportunity for service. If you will interpret office in terms of service, why will you not refuse to hold it unless your opponents too insist upon your holding it?*²¹⁹

Services could be varied. Everyone can live a life of service. Even a sick person can render service. Thus writing to an invalid, he notes:

*Persons who are ill bemoan their inability to do anything for others while they themselves have to accept people's services. This is a grave error. Such a person can do service by thinking pure thoughts, by exacting the minimum of service and bathing; in love those who serve him. He can also serve by keeping cheerful. We should never forget that meditating on God with pure devotion is also service.*²²⁰

It is also noteworthy here, to mention in passing, that Gandhi kept a leper Parchure Shastri in his Sevagram āśram as an inmate and personally tended him by dressing his wounds and massaging his body.

Part of his service was the work he did for the attainment of *swaraj* (independence; literally, self-rule) for the country. But for him, *swarāj* was not the narrow concept of driving away or destroying the British. He did not want the country to adopt this negative approach which, he was sure, would lead to chaos. Accordingly, he reacted strongly to an attack by spirited young men of Fergusson College, Pune, who attacked the acting Governor of Bombay during a visit to their college. He warns them:

²¹⁸ *Hindi Navajivan*, October 24, 1929, in *CW XLII* (1929) no. 54, p. 43-44; cf. also *CW LXI* (1935) no. 518, p. 360.

²¹⁹ Letter on February 16, 1929, in *CW XL* (1929) no. 2, p. 2.

²²⁰ Letter on November 26, 1932, in *CW LII* (1932-1933) no. 98, p. 75; similarly in another letter on November 27, 1932 to a convalescent, in *CW LII* (1932-1933) no. 101, p. 78; cf. also *CW XXXIV* (1927) no. 406, p. 446-447, gives a number of examples of how one could be charitable not merely in words but in deeds.

*Suppose that one or two thousand terrorists, or even more, succeed in killing every Englishman in India. Will that enable them to run the Government of the country? On the contrary, intoxicated by the success of their terrorist methods and in their arrogance, they will go on killing everyone whom they do not like. How will the peasants be benefitted thereby? Such methods will never reform the many evil practices and customs in India which have made her a subject country.*²²¹

Similarly, at the successful conclusion of Bardoli satyāgraha, he tells them that it is not the end of everything; rather they should set about improving their surroundings:

*Do we want swarāj of barbarism, freedom to lie like pigs in a pigsty without let or hindrance from anybody? Or do we want the swarāj of orderliness in which everyman and everything is in his or its proper place? ... We shall be unfit for swarāj if we are unconcerned about our neighbour's insanitation and are content merely to keep our own surroundings clean.*²²²

Hence, he constantly insisted on constructive tasks as a preparation for independence. In the beginning, they were only four: *khādi*, communal unity, eradication of untouchability and the drink evil. Later, as independence seemed closer, he increased it to thirteen by 1939, and further expanded it to eighteen and many more by 1941: "The constructive programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of *pūrṇa swarāj* or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means".²²³ It is also interesting to note that due to this insistence of Gandhi, India was saved much of the confusions and instability which attended a hasty attainment of independence without proper preparation in many a former colony in Asia and Africa. India has remained a democracy whereas many another new country has lapsed into dictatorship. We would have been spared even the ugly and sad tragedy that attended the partition into India and Pakistan, if the country had paid attention to one of his early constructive programmes of communal unity.

His concern for the poor and helpless made him turn his attention to children. He would advocate basic education whereby children's education

²²¹ Navajivan, July 26, 1931, in CW XLVII (1931) no. 229, p. 208-209.

²²² Speech on August 12, 1928, *Young India*, September 13, 1928, in CW XXXVII (1928) no. 202, p. 165.

²²³ CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 227, p. 146 (the whole section of p. 146-166 is interesting); cf. also CW LXXVI (1942) no. 6, p. 6-7; cf. also about constructive programmes in CW LXXII (1940) no. 433, p. 378-381.

would be gradual and in tune with their natural surroundings and they would not be burdened with having to learn a foreign language at a tender age. It was at the same time an education that would involve the using of their hands and other faculties.²²⁴ He was also concerned about infant mortality and the physical sufferings of children. He felt that under the British rule millions of children in India were starving for want of nourishing food and shivering in the cold season for want of sufficient clothing. So when a certain correspondent, Judge Henry Neil of the American Express company had written to him from France, asking whether conditions of children in India would be better if Jesus were to be in full control of India, replied on February 22, 1928:

*Which Jesus have you in mind? The Jesus of history? Not being a critical student of history, I do not know the Jesus of history. Do you mean the Jesus whom Christian England and Christian Europe represent? If so, your question is, it seems to be already answered. If you mean the mystical Jesus of Sermon on the Mount who has still to be found, I suppose the condition of India's children will be a trifle better than it is now when men conform to the precept of love.*²²⁵

As at the previous stage, his interest in *khādi* work remained undiminished. Spinning as an activity, he had felt, quietens the nerves, makes one steady and determined since it involves tying oneself to a given task. It was connected with non-violence "... has its economic, social, political and spiritual aspect. It is the last aspect which makes it a symbol of non-violence".²²⁶ Thus he was able to declare on the eve of his historic Dandi March in connection with salt *satyāgraha* of 1930:

*One thing is now practically universally admitted, that khādi unites the wearer to the poorest of the land. And I may tell you that but for the progress that khādi has made in recent years I should not have been able to launch this campaign.*²²⁷

However, not all were convinced about his emphasis on spinning. Many still had doubts about its effectiveness in the future because of its economic feasi-

²²⁴ CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 303, p. 248-249; CW LXXV (1941-1942) nos. 326-327, p. 263 sq.

²²⁵ Letter on February 22, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 43, p. 40 (emphasis is mine).

²²⁶ CW LXXI (1939-1940) no. 222, p. 182; cf. also CW XXVIII (1925) no. 24 p. 54; CW XXX (1926) no. 582 p. 489-490.

²²⁷ Young India, March 12, 1930, in CW XLIII (1930) no. 36, p. 36.

bility; but he clung on to it for various reasons, some of which we have mentioned above. In 1940, he humorously remarks:

I have compared Segaon [his āśram from 1936] to a mad house. This too is an apt simile. The statement that swarāj can be achieved through the spinning-wheel can come only from the mouth of a mad man! But mad-men are not aware of their madness and so I look upon myself as a wise-man. ²²⁸

His interest in *swadēshi* (preference for locally manufactured goods) also continued. He had ingenious methods of inculcating it. Thus he insisted, during his Andhra tour of 1929, that he should have a *khādi* clad barber. And then again this person had to use Indian made articles when available.²²⁹ However, *swadēshi* did not mean keeping all others out. Thus writing in his *History of the Satyagraha Asram*, he notes:

... there is in swadēshi no room for distinction between one's own and other people. To serve one's neighbour is to serve the world. Indeed it is the only way open to us of serving the world. One to whom the whole world is as his family should have the power of serving the universe without moving from his palace. He can exercise this power only through service rendered to his neighbour. ²³⁰

The spirit of *swadēshi* was transformed at the end of 1934 into an allied movement: the Village Industries Movement. When he quit the Congress, he started, under its aegis, the AIVIA (All India Village Industries Association) with a view to saving the village industries which were dying out as a consequence of oncoming industrialization. It was a means of improving their economic condition and of keeping them busy, healthy and away from migrating to degrading, dehumanizing cities.²³¹ Not many understood his thoughts on this matter and some even just laughed at it, e.g. the learned Mr. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, the President of the Servants of India Association, had this to say to Gandhi on November 23, 1934, in reaction to the announcement about the inauguration of the AIVIA:

To my unaided mind, you appear to be opening the first campaign of an endless and quixotic war against modern civilization. Long ago you pro-

²²⁸ Harijanbandhu, January 28, 1940, in CW LXXI (1939-1940) no. 155, p. 134 (parenthesis is mine).

²²⁹ CW XL (1929) no. 403, p. 434.

²³⁰ CW L (1932) no. 206, p. 217.

²³¹ CW LIX (1934) no. 263, p. 224.

*claimed yourself its sleepless enemy, and now you would, if you could, turn it back on the course it has pursued for several millennia. I reel at the mere thought.*²³²

But Gandhi was undeterred. He was aware of the fact that at that time there were 700,000 villages in India compared to the few cities and towns. Most of the villages had been traditionally: closed, self-sufficient communities with their own mores and simple joys. He did not want this peace to be destroyed by over-centralization. He preferred these self-sufficient groups which nevertheless cooperated with other villages around and thus formed the one big whole. But the quality of village life had to be improved. Its sanitation had declined and was awful;²³³ its water supply system had to be checked and kept clean;²³⁴ the village roads had to be repaired and improved.²³⁵ And with the introduction of AIVIA, he wanted the village industries such as hand-pounding of rice, oil extraction by simple oil presses, smithy, carpentry, rope-making, basket-weaving to be revived. In this manner, he felt, the villagers would be kept busy, self-sufficient and not too dependent on the city-produced industrial goods.

As in the previous stage, in this too, he championed the cause of women: abolition of the dowry system,²³⁶ child-marriage, temple prostitution;²³⁷ ending of the *purdah* system, especially in North India, so that women may come out, be educated, become courageous, lose their inferiority complex and take part in the struggle for *swarāj*.²³⁸ He declared that "Re-

²³² CW LIX (1934) no. 411 (footnote no. 1), p. 363.

²³³ Cf. CW XLI (1929) no. 398, p. 445-448; CW XLI (1929) no. 238, p. 295-296; CW XLII (1929-1930) no. 121, p. 103-104.

²³⁴ CW XLII (1929-1930) no. 373, p. 390-391.

²³⁵ CW XLII (1929-1930) no. 440, p. 363; cf. also his project of a congress worker being in charge of villages within a 10 mile radius wherein he would make a sociological survey and undertake various improvements in the condition of the villages [CW XLVI (1931) no. 425, p. 336-338] and the political strategy this involved and included [CW XLVIII (1931) no. 291, p. 261] since this would mean that the voice of the congress had reached every village!

²³⁶ Cf. Speech on February 5, 1929, in CW XXXIX (1929) no. 14, p. 416.

²³⁷ Cf. CW XXXIV (1927) many references at every speech during his South Indian tour of 1927.

²³⁸ Cf. CW XLI (1929) no. 83, p. 88-89.

nunciation and non-violence come naturally to women ...".²³⁹ He protested against all ill treatment of women which was then quite prevalent.²⁴⁰ All have the same *ātman* be they men or women, young or old, whatever else be the difference.²⁴¹

He continued also his campaign against the drink evil and rejoiced when some of the newly elected Congress-controlled legislatures introduced prohibition, e.g. Bombay in 1937. Regarding the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity, the days of enthusiasm during the *Khilāfat* Movement of the previous stage was long passed to be replaced with growing estrangement. By 1927, Gandhi declared:

*... the problem has passed out of human hands ... God had taken it into his own. Maybe the statement springs from my egotism. But I do not think so. I have ample reason for it. With my hand on my breast, I can say that not a minute in my life am I forgetful of God ... I toiled for it here, I did penance for it, but God was not satisfied, God did not want me to take any credit for the work. And so I have now washed my hands. I am helpless. I have exhausted my efforts.*²⁴²

However, he did not lose all hope. Though he could not do much, he prayed and waited. Four years later, he declares prophetically:

*... my early upbringing, my childhood and youth has been to strive for Hindu-Muslim unity. No one may dismiss it today as merely a craze of my old age ... even if I die striving for it, I shall achieve peace of mind ... I am ready to serve you in the matter of establishing Hindu-Muslim unity ... It is a question of lover and beloved. I am in search of it; I was anxiously waiting for it. If Hindu-Muslim unity is achieved, the mission of my life would be fulfilled.*²⁴³

Hindu-Muslim riots continued sporadically with increasing violence. Muslims, under the leadership of M.A. Jinnah, began to demand an indepen-

²³⁹ Speech on April 13, 1930, in **CW XLIII** (1930) no. 246, p. 253.

²⁴⁰ **CW XLI** (1929) no. 207, p; 268.

²⁴¹ Cf. **CW XXXIII** (1927) no. 293, p. 284; **CW XXXIV** (1927) no. 293, p. 314.

²⁴² Speech on January 16, 1927, **Young India**, January 27, 1927, in **CW XXXII** (1926-1927) no. 257, p. 571-572.

²⁴³ Speech at the Council of All-India Muslim League at Delhi on February 22, 1931, **The Hindustan Times**; February 25, 1931, in **CW XLV** (1930-1931) no. 287, p. 216-217. Prophetic, because he died in the cause. His dream of unity was not wholly achieved. Each side suspected Gandhi; the Hindus that he betrayed them, the Muslims that he favoured only Hindus. He was shot dead by a Hindu fanatic and at least momentarily, the Hindu-Muslim antagonism which had reached a climax, abated.

dent Pakistan. Gandhi was disconsolate and tried various solutions, giving in as much as possible to the Muslim demand short of complete break away. He suggested towards the end of 1941, the 'unitary' method, based on love and justice but he was accused of torturing the language by some who contended that what Gandhi was suggesting could be better described as 'unilateral' surrender on the part of Hindus rather than 'unitary'. Gandhi defended himself:

I must plead not guilty. "Unilateral" has a definite legal meaning which does not fit in with what I am struggling to convey. It is not onesidedness. It is no-sidedness. It has impartiality in it. But it is not the method of impartiality. It is something more. I represent a party, say, the Congress. For the solution of the problem I apply a method whereby I seek to affect those who are estranged from me. I am not merely impartial, because I may or may not please them. Impartiality has to be felt by the aggrieved party. My conduct is independent of the aggrieved party. I go to the utmost length to placate the offended party, and trust my out-and-out pure conduct to affect them. I may not succeed at once. But if there is a real sense of justice in the method, it must succeed. For want of a better word I have called the method "unitary".²⁴⁴

It was a noble attempt, born of Gandhi's spirit of love but it did not succeed and bear the desired fruit since the Congress did not accept his proposal.

During this stage, Gandhi's work for the untouchables continued with unabated enthusiasm. He declares: "The service of Harijan is after all the service of God. But God gets his work done through man. He gets His work done by one who feels His presence and fears Him".²⁴⁵ He had fasted in prison in 1933 because he was prevented by the Government from carrying on his work for the removal of untouchability. On the eighth day of the fast he was released and he remarked enthusiastically: "... whether in prison or outside prison, Harijan service will be always after my heart and will be the

²⁴⁴ CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 343, p. 285-286; he describes the unitary method thus: "In a well-regulated family the relations are governed by the unitary method. Thus a father gives to his children not as a result of a pact. He gives out of love, a sense of justice without expecting any return therefor. Not that there is none. But everything is natural, nothing is forced. Nothing is done out of fear or distrust. What is true of a well-regulated family is equally true of a well-regulated society which is but an extended family" [CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 328, p. 264]. Thus he advocated that the Congressmen should "rigidly abstain from legislatures and local bodies governed by separate electorates". In such cases they should rather "put the Muslim members on their honour" to look after the Hindu interests. He describes what he would do in such a situation: "I would seek to influence them from outside these bodies by being friends with them and rendering disinterested service" [CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 312, p. 237].

²⁴⁵ Speech at Akola on November 18, 1933, in CW LVI (1933-1934) no. 269, p. 255-256.

breath of life for me, more precious than the daily bread".²⁴⁶ He was faced with a very curious assertion by orthodox Hindus who upheld untouchability. They said that precisely by practising untouchability they were loving the untouchables. The idea seems to be that those supposedly born untouchables were expiating the sins of their previous life in accord with the law of *karma* and hence by ill treating the untouchables, they were helping them to be born higher in the next birth. Gandhi was appalled by the assertion and said that it is no part of love. Love must be shown in deeds of goodness:

*Love is made of innumerable suns. When one small sun cannot remain hidden, how can love? Does a mother ever have to go about saying that she loves her child? A child who cannot yet speak looks into the eyes of his mother. When their eyes meet we can tell from their looks that they are in communion with something divine.*²⁴⁷

His demands on workers for Harijan service was stringent. He wanted humble, loving, earnest volunteers filled with a spirit of service and ready to be identified with the Harijans.²⁴⁸ One of the items of Harijan uplift which occupied his mind was the temple-entry. He wanted that they be allowed in on the same condition as other Hindus were admitted into the temple and refused to visit any temple that barred temple-entry to Harijans. He considered that God did not reside in such temples. His joy was great when temples began to open their doors to Harijans one by one, though all did not comply with his wish. He was convinced that after temple-entry was achieved, the status of the Harijans would begin to improve all round.²⁴⁹ Accordingly, he hoped they would give up their habit of carrion-eating, beef-eating, drink and take to education and grow in appreciation of their self-respect. For him untouchability was "a sin against God and man",²⁵⁰ since it degraded man in whom God resided. He pointed out clearly the ingenious way in which caste Hindus had perpetrated injustice, using religion to oppress the Harijans. Perhaps they were not conscious of the hidden motives

²⁴⁶ *Harijan*, August 26, 1933, in *CW LV* (1933) no. 421, p. 366.

²⁴⁷ *CW LV* (1933) no. 192, p. 170-171; cf. also interesting arguments with *Sanātānists* in *CW LII* (1932-1933) no. 480, p. 360-361; *CW LIII* (1933) no. 191, p. 143.

²⁴⁸ Cf. *CW LIV* (1933) no. 54, p. 48; *CW LVIII* (1934) no. 200, p. 182-183.

²⁴⁹ Cf. *CW LIV* (1933) no. 220, p. 203; *CW LIV* (1933) no. 144, p. 129.

²⁵⁰ *CW LIII* (1933) no. 356, p. 257; *CW LVIII* (1934) no. 205, p. 199; *CW LVIII* (1934) no. 222, p. 219-220.

in keeping the Harijans in subjection so that they could do all the menial tasks for the upper castes and be paid little or nothing as wages. Gandhi would debunk for the caste Hindus this situation wherein they had quoted Hindu scriptures, cited customs and religious sanctions to continue the injustice:

*Injustice is being done by all the world over, but we have given to it the sanction of religion. These distinctions have not been created by God. The Harijans are on the lowest rung of the ladder not because of any inherent defects but only because they have been kept down by the so-called higher castes.*²⁵¹

This brings us to a further consideration of the way in which Gandhi analysed situations of injustice and how he tried to change them.

Gandhi's method seems to be first to become acquainted with the situation. He would meticulously collect all the data possible, reflect over them and then try to present them to his audience, rouse up their conscience to respond adequately to the situation of injustice. He would try to probe into any hidden cause that may be behind a situation of injustice. Finally, he would present them with his method for overcoming the unjust situation. Thus in 1927, he compares and contrasts the average daily wages in different countries: in the USA it was Rs 14 per day; in England Rs 7; in France Rs 6; in Japan Rs 5; while in India it was a meagre one and a half an anna, i.e. less than 0.11 Rupee.²⁵² With this information, he could tell his audience during the convocation address at Bihar Vidyapith, Patna, that when he was shown around the Economic Institute, Allahabad, and told that it cost Rs 3,000,000 his reaction had been: "You could not raise these palaces but by starving millions".²⁵³ Commenting on a letter from a lady who had visited Delhi and had compared the Government buildings with the dismal hovels of the poor there, he notes:

²⁵¹ CW LVI (1933-1934) no. 289, p. 269; cf. also CW LIII (1933) no. 504, p. 375 — caste Hindus had adduced the doctrine of *karma* to justify their conduct (see also above, ch. III, footnote no. 247, p. 162).

²⁵² Speech at Patna on January 30, 1927, *Search Light*, February 2, 1927, in CW XXXVIII (1927) no. 23, p. 30.

²⁵³ Speech on January 30, 1927, *Young India*, February 10, 1927, in CW XXXVIII (1927) no. 22, p. 27.

*Every palace that one sees in India is a demonstration not of her riches but of the insolence of power that riches give to the few, who owe them to the miserably requited labours of the millions of the paupers of India.*²⁵⁴

He was reluctant to accept the many flower garlands offered to him at public meetings. He calculates the wastage of money over these garlands. Every rupee saved on these garlands would mean that at least sixteen women could be given a meal and asks: "Are we not ashamed to be deaf to the cry of the poor on whose toil we live, and from whose toil we draw our sustenance?"²⁵⁵

What is the cause of this poverty, he asks himself and finds that the cause is not only ignorance: "Poverty, if it is due to ignorance, is no less due to heartless unparalleled exploitation".²⁵⁶ Is he then going to tell the poor that poverty is blessed and that they should embrace poverty willingly and in patience? He would revolt against any such falsehood. Thus speaking to a Western audience at Guildhouse Church, London, on September 9, 1931, where he was asked to speak on voluntary poverty, he enlightens his audience:

*I do not go among my fellows who starve and talk of voluntary poverty; I do not tell them how blessed they would be if they changed that involuntary poverty into voluntary. There is no such thing as magic of that character on earth. It is a painful process, and these men have first of all to have the necessities of life before I can talk to them of voluntary poverty.*²⁵⁷

He would make the students realize that most of the money for their education comes from the taxes extracted from poor farmers and from excise revenues derived from tax on alcohol which was further ruining the lives of the poor (under the British, excise revenue was totally allocated to the education department):

It comes from the pockets of the poor, the walking skeletons of Orissa. They do not know what college education means; their eyes lack lustre; their bodies are emaciated ... What have you done for them? Nor should you

²⁵⁴ **Young India**, April 28, 1927, in **CW XXXIII** (1927) no. 277, p. 272.

²⁵⁵ Speech at Chanda on February 4, 1927, **Young India**, February 17, 1927, in **CW XXXIII** (1927) no. 41, p. 46.

²⁵⁶ Letter to Surendra Singh of the Ministry of Agriculture on April 26, 1931, in **CW XLVI** (1931) no 42, p. 47.

²⁵⁷ **CW XLVIII** (1931-1932) no. 33, p. 57; the whole speech is very interesting, p. 50-58.

*forget that your education is financed out of the notorious "excise revenue" which spells the moral ruin of so many of your countrymen.*²⁵⁸

During the Civil Disobedience Movement, he tried to rouse up the conscience of all those Indians who were *unconsciously* cooperating with their British masters in oppressing the poor, who were after all their fellow Indians, their own kith and kin:

*The greatest obstacle in the path of non-violence is the presence in our midst of their indigenous interests that have sprung from British rule, the interests of monied men, speculators, scrip-holders, land-holders, factory owners and the like. All these do not always realize that they are living on the blood of the masses, and when they do, they become as callous as the British principals whose tools and agents they are ... It must not be difficult for them to see that the holding of millions is a crime when millions of their own kith and kin are starving and that therefore they must give up their agency. No principal has yet been found able to work without faithful agents.*²⁵⁹

Similarly, he also tries to make the various Indian government officials, from the collectors down to the village Headmen and accountants, aware of the evil of their cooperation with the British, thus participating in cruel exploitation:

*This system of government is confessedly based upon a merciless exploitation of unnumbered millions of the inhabitants of India. From village Headman to their personal assistants these satraps have created a class of subordinates who, whilst they cringe before their foreign masters, in their constant dealing with the people act so irresponsibly and so harshly as to demoralize them and by a system of terrorism render them incapable of resisting corruption. It is then the duty of those who have realized the awful evil of the system of Indian Government to be disloyal to it and actively and openly to preach disloyalty. Indeed, loyalty to a state so corrupt is a sin, disloyalty a virtue.*²⁶⁰

He prided in calling himself a worker since he engaged himself in daily sacrificial spinning. By 1935, he interested himself in the problem of minimum wages and was forthright in declaring that:

*If we find that it is not possible for any industry to pay this minimum living wage, we had better close our shop. We should see that in any industry that we handle, the wage covers a reasonable maintenance allowance.*²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Speech at D.J.S. College Hall, Karachi on February 5, 1929) to college students, in *CW XXXIX* (1929) no. 14, p. 415.

²⁵⁹ *CW XLII* (1929-1930) no. 429, p. 452-453 (emphasis is mine).

²⁶⁰ *Young India*, March 27, 1930, in *CW XLIII* (1930) no. 131, p. 132-133.

²⁶¹ *Harizan*, August 31, 1935 in *CW LXI* (1935) no. 510, p. 349.

He wanted his fellow-workers who were running *khādi* stores to pay this minimum wage to the spinners though it would mean raising the prices; nor should they take refuge in saying that the spinners are willing to accept lower wages:

*We may no longer exploit the poverty of the people ... It is idle to argue that the spinners themselves would plumb for a smaller wage for all than a higher wage for a few. That is the argument of every exploiter and slave-owner and indeed there were unfortunate folks amongst slaves who hugged the chains of slavery.*²⁶²

He would ask his *khādi* workers to pay not less than half an anna (1/32 of a Rupee) per hour²⁶³ and in 1937, he further increased it to one anna (1/16 of a Rupee) per hour and insisted on equal wages for women.²⁶⁴ Similarly, he would join the mill labourers in their demand for restoration of their pay which had been lowered six years earlier on the plea of falling profits. Gandhi argued that falling profits is not a valid argument. It does not mean loss but only lesser dividends for the shareholders; nor would he accept the argument that the workers were not intelligent and thus cannot share responsibility in running the mills:

*All shareholders are not intelligent persons. No one examines their hearts and their heads. Nevertheless, they have a right to vote, and mills continue to function. In my opinion, they will function better if the labourers were given ownership rights.*²⁶⁵

He would want the labourers to realize their own role in industry and become conscious of their strength. Speaking in Geneva on December 10, 1931, he expostulates:

*... If labour would only understand and recognize that capital is perfectly helpless without labour, labour would easily come to its own ... a moment's thought would show that labour has at its disposal a capital that capitalists never possess ...*²⁶⁶

²⁶² CW LXI (1935) no. 591, p. 412-413.

²⁶³ CW LXI (1935) no. 548, p. 378.

²⁶⁴ CW LXIV (1936-1937) no. 409, p. 406-407; he also give his definition of poverty: "... those who, despite working the whole day, cannot earn three annas (3/16 of a Rupee) are all poor". CW LXIV (1936-1937) no. 410, p. 407-408.

²⁶⁵ Navajivan, December 15, 1929, in CW XLII (1929-1930) no. 292, p. 275-276.

²⁶⁶ CW XLVIII (1931-1932) no. 263, p. 418.

He was not for the destruction of the capitalist since that would be like killing the goose that lays golden eggs. He wanted the capitalist to consider himself as a trustee: "We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those on whom he depends for the making, the retention and increase of his capital".²⁶⁷ He wished that there be a relation as in a family between the employer and his employees: "In the West there is a water-tight division between the employer and the employees ... The relation between mill-agents and mill-hands ought to be one of father and children or between blood-brothers".²⁶⁸ Thus in industrial disputes he preferred arbitration and continued to succeed in some of the industrial disputes in Ahmedabad. He was not averse to the capitalist making his pile but he wanted him to know that he has a corresponding responsibility to dedicate it to the service of all.²⁶⁹ But what is to be done if the whole thing fails? Non-violent non-cooperation is always present but it is the last recourse and done always with a spirit of *ahimsā* or love. Of this we shall consider in the next section.

Perhaps it would not be out of place here to mention the concern and care he had for others even in little things. Thus he is concerned about handwriting and how a bad handwriting can hurt and cause pain to others:

*Bad handwriting is of course a form of discourtesy. Discourtesy in every form is violence, but bad handwriting is direct violence too. Anything which causes unnecessary pain to our neighbour or to any living creature is nothing but violence. I have twice as much experience as others of what pain and inconvenience are caused to the reader by bad handwriting. I have, in the first place, the experience of having to read letters written in bad writing by others and also the experience of the pain caused to others by my handwriting. My aim in saying this is to advise all inmates of the āśram, men and women, boys and girls, to take great care to write a good hand. This requires no time but only some thought. One must have love for the other party.*²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ CW XLV (1930-1931) no. 396, p. 339; cf. also CW XLV (1930-1931) no. 369, p. 298-299; CW XLV (1930-1931) no. 356, p. 280-281.

²⁶⁸ CW XXXVI (1928) no. 343, p. 288-289; cf. also CW XLVI (1931) no. 283, p. 235, where he wants *zamīndars* (large land-owners and revenue collectors) to treat their tenant-farmers as members of their own family.

²⁶⁹ *Harijan*, February 22, 1942, in CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 356, p. 295.

²⁷⁰ Letter of December 4, 1930, to Narandas Gandhi, in CW XLIV (1930) no. 516, p. 374.

He had care for the health of others²⁷¹ and whenever possible, would spare no time and effort in nursing them. No sacrifice was too little to bring some comfort to them. Thus when his friend C.F. Andrews was ill, he offered to go over to visit him, in spite of his own vow not to move out of the *āśram* at that time for a year.²⁷² He used to be often pleased to describe himself as being not only paternal but maternal as well in his attitude towards his friends and close acquaintances.²⁷³ A psychiatrist Erik H. Erikson also notes this with interest and is critical because of the possessiveness this implies. Thus writing an imaginary letter to Gandhi, he notes:

*... throughout your life you appropriate other people's children unconditionally for your way of life with a truly dictatorial combination of maternalism and paternalism. Yet nowhere do you indicate that you cared to understand what your usurpation of motherhood meant to the children — or indeed, to the mothers.*²⁷⁴

It is true that all who came close to him were captivated and for the most part remained attached to him, following him. Though one cannot deny that there were exceptions and Gandhi professed keeping the door open for any who wanted to leave him temporarily or for good. And some did leave him, but he always made sure that those who left him, did so in good spirit.

At the conclusion of this section, we could summarize what we have noted. Gandhi's seeking for Truth-God was prosecuted with the means available to him. The first means was prayer. Prayer dispelled cowardice, increased faith and trust in God; it energized one's action and dispelled all despair; it gave guidance at all times and formed an integral part of his decision taking process. The prayer he stressed at this stage was both private and congregational. The prayer in common was an expression of the social aspect of prayer and as such one perseveres in it in spite of all distractions.

²⁷¹ Cf. Letter of July 28, 1926 to Hemaprabhadevi, in CW XXXI (1926) no. 229, p. 210; cf. also a number of letters from Yeravda prison enquiring about the health of others, even minute details, e.g. weight, diet, constipation (a big problem at the *āśram*), in CW XLIV (1930)

²⁷² Cf. CW XXXI (1926) nos. 478 & 479, p. 444-445.

²⁷³ Cf. Letter to Mirabehn, in CW XXXII (1926-1927) no. 137, p. 420, asking her to describe her prayer, meals, and even the activity of the bowels! There are innumerable references to this his human concern, wherein nothing was too small or unimportant. From 1934 to 1941, there are many letters to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur whom he affectionately calls "Rebel", "Idiot", and signs himself as "Tyrant"

²⁷⁴ ERIKSON, E.H., *Gandhi's Truth*, New York, 1969, p. 241.

But prayer without corresponding action is useless. Hence his search included as means, a life of simplicity and dedicated action on behalf of everyone. In concrete, this involved him in a multitude of activities on behalf of the untouchables, women, farmers, industrial labourers, spinners, students, princes, politicians and many others besides. During this stage, he concentrated on what he termed 'constructive programmes' in order to ready the nation for a genuine independence. Another interest during this stage was the starting of AIVIA through which he wished to revive village industries and improve the lot of poor villagers. During this stage, he engaged himself in tackling various situations of injustice and tried to make people realize the injustices involved and the hidden motives behind them. For Gandhi nothing was too small, he tried to live a life of genuine concern for others in every tiny detail of life.

V. *Satyāgraha* and *Ahimsā* during this stage

So far we have seen that Gandhi's search for Truth-God was earnest and he had located it basically in the oneness of all reality. The means for prosecuting the search, concretely, was through prayer and an active life of dedication to fulfil the various needs of his fellowmen both as individuals and a society. In the situation in which he was placed, he found that untruth abounded, i.e. injustices abounded. He set about removing these untruths so that Truth-God may shine forth in all Its splendour. In this task, he employed the one weapon he had discovered in South Africa. The weapon of *satyāgraha* he had already begun to use in India but it did not seem to succeed because *ahimsā* its essential accompaniment was not followed. Violence and hatred still existed in the Indian society. These have to be removed and *ahimsā* had to take root, for then only could he use *satyāgraha* with telling effect and true independence will come as light follows darkness. But then neither *satyāgraha* nor *ahimsā* were clearly understood by his countrymen. *Satyāgraha* was made too cheap and some began to think that any and every protest and agitation was *satyāgraha* (such misunderstanding, unfortunately, persists even today in Indian society in spite of all that Gandhi has said and done). We shall first consider his notion and practice of *satyāgraha* at this stage and then the notion and practice of *ahimsā*. But we have to remember that often these notions run one into the other. *Satyāgraha* is meaningless without *ahimsā* or non-violence which he persistently began to call as love but did not like calling it so since 'love' as a

word, he felt, had different connotations and to him it seemed narrower than the mystical *ahimsā*. He tended to use them together —“*ahimsā* or love”— and would further describe it as soul-force. Of this we shall treat in due course.

Now turning first to *satyāgraha*, he set about correcting the various misunderstandings regarding it. Speaking at Nagercoil on October 8, 1927, he describes it as a priceless weapon which has to be used with a religious spirit and after exhausting all other means:

*I venture to claim that I have placed in the hands of the reformer a matchless and priceless weapon in the form of satyāgraha. But then the conditions of successful satyāgraha are fairly hard. If he has faith in God, faith in himself, faith in his cause, he will never be violent, not even against his most fierce opponent whom he would accuse rightly of injustice, ignorance and even violence. I state without fear of contradiction that truth has never been vindicated by violence ... Since satyāgraha is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a satyāgrahi exhausts all other means before he resorts to satyāgraha.*²⁷⁵

In 1930, he was preparing the people to launch Civil Disobedience and the possible great sufferings for the people such as imprisonments and confiscation of properties. So he devised various rules of conduct for *satyāgrahis*, describing what they should do in case of communal fights which may divert the attention; how to behave in prisons or when one's property is confiscated; and in general how to behave as a member of the *satyāgrahi* unit. In this connection, he describes briefly the meaning of *satyāgraha*, of which he had spoken often:

*Satyāgraha literally means insistence on truth. This insistence arms the votary with matchless power. This power or force is connoted by the word satyāgraha. Satyāgraha to be genuine, may be offered against parents, against one's wife or one's children, against rulers, against fellow-citizen, even against the whole world. Such a universal force necessarily makes no distinction between kinsmen and strangers, young and old, man and woman, friend and foe. The force to be so applied can never be physical. There is in it no room for violence. The only force of universal application can, therefore, be that of ahimsā or love. In other words it is soul-force. Love does not burn others, it burns itself.*²⁷⁶

Satyāgraha had its parodies and some people tried them on their own without really understanding what *satyāgraha* meant and as if Gandhi had ap-

²⁷⁵ *Young India*, October 20, 1927, in *CW XXXV* (1927-1928) no. 72, p. 99-100.

²⁷⁶ *Young India*, February 27, 1930, in *CW XLII* (1929-1930) no. 463, p. 491; the rules and guidance for *satyāgrahis* can be found on p. 491-493.

proved their project. Thus in 1927 at Nagpur, some misguided youngmen started what they thought was *satyāgraha* and chose for civil disobedience the Arms Act which forbids the carrying of arms in public. They courted arrests by carrying arms publicly without authorization. When Gandhi was told this, he denied authorizing them to do this or, for that matter, allowing them to launch a *satyāgraha*. Then Gandhi proceeded to explain how a genuine Civil Disobedience could be a part of *satyāgraha* but every *satyāgraha* need not be a Civil Disobedience. What is important for *satyāgraha* is self-purification through participation in a constructive programme prior to any Civil Disobedience and he cites the two constructive programmes in which he was then engaged, namely *khādi* and Hindu-Muslim unity. Once the person is thus purified (and therefore a determined person, full of love which was essential), he could then undertake Civil Disobedience. This Civil Disobedience would mean: e.g. suppose it were to ask for the release of a Nationalist leader unjustly kept in prison, the civil-disobedience volunteers march to the Governor's residence to ask for it boldly and if prevented on the way or assaulted, they do not retaliate but suffer the injury. For such a Civil Disobedience even one person is enough. For himself, Gandhi says, he was not ready, not yet purified since anger rose in him when he heard of misdeeds. He concludes by saying: "Let no man mock at *satyāgraha*. Let no man parody it. If at all it is possible, leave *satyāgraha* alone".²⁷⁷ He asks that *satyāgraha* and Civil Disobedience should not be mixed up though they are connected and the aim of Civil Disobedience is also the conversion of the oppressing Government:

*Do not for one moment mix up satyāgraha with Civil Disobedience. Civil disobedience is no doubt a brand of satyāgraha. It comes not at the beginning but at the fag-end. It presupposes great self-restraint. It is based upon charity, and it never puts an unfavourable or unwarranted construction even upon the motives of its opponents. For it seeks not to coerce but to convert.*²⁷⁸

Seven years later, he felt that Civil Disobedience had been misused because those who engaged themselves in it had not prepared themselves for it properly nor did they abide by all its rules:

²⁷⁷ CW XXXIV (1927) no. 146, p. 173; cf. also p. 170-173.

²⁷⁸ Speech at Trivandrum on October 10, 1927, *Young India*, October 20, 1927, in CW XXXV (1927-1928) no. 74, p. 104.

*Civil Disobedience does not consist in courting imprisonment or mounting the gallows anyhow. Civil Disobedience has been completely abused in its spirit. One must cultivate fitness for Civil Disobedience. It has great destructive power. To cultivate such fitness, one must have voluntarily and scrupulously obeyed all laws and rules. How many people can we find who have done so?*²⁷⁹

He expected much from his Sabarmati āśram. He thought that they would become members with faultless character and thus prepared, they would be ready for *satyāgraha* but he was not sure if he had succeeded in preparing them. Writing on April 4, 1927 to one who had said that he was starting a *satyāgraha dal* or group, he notes:

*Who will build up faultless character? How is it defined? You for one know well that the Satyāgraha āśram exists just for it. And even there, who could certify faultless character? Satyāgraha and the satyāgrahis are like the sun and its rays, you cannot hide them under a bushel, they cannot be unmade by your refusing to recognize them. Everywhere today I see occasions for satyāgraha: but where are those who would offer it? Those that would are ever ready. They are preparing themselves and when they have confidence they will never wait for my permission or anyone else's.*²⁸⁰

The Sabarmati āśram in the end proved a partial disappointment to him. He found various deficiencies in it and when an opportunity offered itself in 1933, he disbanded it though ostensibly calling it a sacrifice and offered the place to the Government if it wanted.²⁸¹ In the following year, we can see a subtle change in his opinion. He felt that the masses have not really understood *satyāgraha* because the means used for propagating it had not been spiritual enough. Yet, if at least the director of the movement was thorough, it would be the next best. However, he as a director was not yet perfect or sure:

I feel that the masses have not received the full message of satyāgraha owing to its adulteration in the process of transmission. It has become clearer to me that spiritual instruments suffer in their potency when their use is taught through non-spiritual media ... Satyāgraha is a purely spiritual weapon. It may be used for what may appear to be mundane ends and through men and women who do not understand its spirituality provided the director knows that the weapon is spiritual. Everyone cannot use surgical instruments. Many may use them if there is an expert behind them directing their use. I claim to be a satyāgraha expert in the making. I have need to be far more careful than the expert surgeon who is complete

²⁷⁹ Letter to Kotwal, April 20, 1934, in **CW LVII** (1934) no. 437, p. 418.

²⁸⁰ Letter to Fulchand K. Shah, in **CW XXXIII** (1927) no. 270, p. 263.

²⁸¹ Cf. letter to Government on July 26, 1933, in **CW LV** (1933) no. 351-352, p. 301-305.

*master of his science. I am still a humble searcher. The very nature of the science of **satyāgraha** precludes the student from seeing more than the step immediately in front of him.*²⁸²

Four years later, in 1938, he seems to alter his position slightly. A correspondent had wondered if Gandhi were waiting for all the people to become **satyāgrahis** and the aggressor to become noble before achieving independence; Gandhi responded by saying that it was not necessary for all to become **satyāgrahis** (by now he, perhaps, felt that it was nearly impossible) but it was enough if there was a committed group. He expected the following qualifications from such a committed group:

*... I am in a position to state what, in my opinion, are basic assumptions underlying the doctrine of **satyāgraha**: 1° There must be common honesty among **satyāgrahis**. 2° They must render heart discipline to their commander. There should be no mental reservation. 3° They must be prepared to lose all, not merely their possessions, land, cash, etc., but also the liberty and possession of their families, and they must be ready cheerfully to face bullets, or even slow death by torture. 4° They must not be violent in thought, word or deed towards the "enemy" among themselves.*²⁸³

He then discovered much misunderstanding among volunteers and felt that they were taking wrong routes. So, five months later, in 1939 he seems to have increased his demands on the **satyagrahis**. After four days of fast at Rajkot (when he had time enough for quiet thinking), he spelled out a different set of stringent qualifications and says that they are not exhaustive and so, more may be added. A reading would show the high standard expected and one would be justified in wondering if they are feasible at all:

*... the following qualifications which I hold are essential for every **satyāgrahi** in India: 1° He must have a living faith in God, for He is his only Rock. 2° He must believe in truth and non-violence as his creed and therefore have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature which he expects to evoke by his truth and love expressed through his suffering. 3° He must be leading a chaste life and be ready and willing for the sake of his cause to give up his life and his possessions. 4° He must be a habitual **khādi**-wearer and spinner This is essential for India. 5° He must be a teetotaler and be free from the use of other intoxicants in order that his reason may be always unclouded and his mind constant. 6° He must carry out with a willing heart all the rules of discipline as may be laid down from time to time. 7° He should carry out the jail rules unless they are specially devised to hurt his self-respect. The qualifications are not to be regarded as exhaustive. They are illustrative only.*²⁸⁴

²⁸² Statement to the Press on April 2, 1934, in **CW LVII** (1934) no. 360, p. 349.

²⁸³ **Harijan**, October 22, 1938, in **CW LXVII** (1938) no. 636, p. 437.

²⁸⁴ **Harijan**, March 25, 1939, in **CW LXIX** (1939) no. 82, p. 70.

We need to look at the importance he put on the first of these essential requirements. He realized that it would be next to impossible for someone to remain humble, courageous, self-possessed, obedient and non-violent without faith in God. Two months later, he was asked during a meeting of Gandhi Seva Sangh whether faith in God is a necessary qualification for a *satyāgrahi* and whether one who has no such faith is to be kept out of the movement. Gandhi was categorical in his reply:

*I am sorry, but I shall have to say, "yes". God alone is the strength for a satyāgrahi. He wants to walk on his own legs. He does not want a stick for support. He does not depend on any strength from outside. Faith in God is an inner strength. Hence the path of satyāgraha is closed to those who do not accept this ... Faith in God is itself the power behind non-violence.*²⁸⁵

His conviction on this score only increased and he became all the more insistent. Thus a year and a half later, he affirms regarding the basic grounding for all the training to produce a genuine *satyāgrahi*:

*I have a firm conviction that the very foundation of this training is faith in God. If that is absent, all the training one may have received is likely to fail at the critical moment ... The only weapon of the satyāgrahi is God, by whatsoever name one knows Him. Without Him the satyāgrahi is devoid of strength before an opponent armed with monstrous weapons. Most people lie prostrate before physical might. But he who accepts God as his only Protector will remain unbent before the mightiest earthly power.*²⁸⁶

This faith in God is necessary for the *satyāgrahi* because the *āgraha* (firm insistence) he makes is based on the *satya* (truth) and Truth, as Gandhi understood, is God. This resistance is not passive in the sense of doing nothing, but active in the sense of doing something, insisting on truth and this is done with love, with goodness of heart, in short with *ahimsā*. Thus replying earlier to Rev. Boyd W. Tucker on February 2, 1928 he comments, perhaps on Mt 5:39, thus:

*"Resist not evil" with me has never meant passive resistance. The word "passive resistance" I have described as a misnomer for the resistance which I have known and offered. The paraphrase of "resist not evil" means resist not evil with evil, and therefore necessarily means resist evil with good.*²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Speech at Brindaban on May 6, 1939 in *CW LXIX* (1939) no. 240, p. 226; cf. also his talks with co-workers at Rajkot on May 17, 1939, in *CW LXIX* (1939) no. 284, p. 273

²⁸⁶ *Harijan*, October 13, 1940, in *CW LXXIII* (1940-1941) no. 48, p. 69.

²⁸⁷ *CW XXXVI* (1928) no. 52, p. 49.

This again meant that one had faith in God.

Prior to 1939, he had taken it for granted that a *satyāgrahi* had faith and reliance on God. He makes the requirement explicit only at this late stage in 1939. Earlier (1929), he had been content to speak of the method of action by a *satyāgrahi*. After studying carefully the situation of injustice which he wants to change and calculating his own purity in the matter in question, further calculating his capacity for non-violence in a spirit of *ahimsā* or love and relying on the strength of possible public opinion which may be roused, the *satyāgrahi* acts:

*... a person who claims to be a satyāgrahi always tries by close and prayerful self-introspection and self-analysis to find out whether he is himself completely free from the taint of anger, ill will and such other human infirmities, whether he is not himself capable of those very evils against which he is out to lead a crusade ... must first mobilize public opinion against the evil which he is out to eradicate, by means of a wide and intensive agitation. When public opinion is sufficiently roused against a social abuse even the tallest will not dare to practise or openly to lend support to it. An awakened and intelligent public opinion is the most potent weapon of a satyāgrahi.*²⁸⁸

Thus we notice here that reliance on God is not even mentioned but only taken for granted; reliance is rather placed on "awakened intelligent public opinion". Perhaps it was the success he had in minor encounters that misled him into giving a wrong emphasis. Thus he had succeeded in the 1928 Bardoli *satyāgraha* where it was a question of righting the wrong and unjust assessment of land revenues. Again at the end of 1928 and the beginning of 1929, he had supported the students of a Gujarat college in their strike against the college principal, Mr. Shirras, who had unjustly penalized the students, then had relented, given his word of honour and had again changed, breaking his given word. Here too, the *satyāgraha* had succeeded. At the end of the second success, Gandhi attributed them to the strength of the public opinion and the disciplined non-violence of those who took part in the two *satyāgrahas*:

The main features that were to be found in the Bardoli satyāgraha were present here. In Bardoli the demand was for justice. Leaders of the agitation were competent men. People obeyed rules and were determined. The peasantry of Bardoli was able, through peaceful conduct, to win over public opinion, hence the Government finally had to bow. All these things were true in the case of the students. Here too, the leaders were competent, the students had faith in them. The students were firm and their demand

²⁸⁸ *Young India*, August 8, 1929, in CW XLI (1929) no. 145, p. 203-204.

*was just. The students obeyed rules and, by their peaceful behaviour, were able to win over public opinion.*²⁸⁹

But much water had flown under the bridge since then and Gandhi had become wiser by 1939, realizing that a lively faith and trust in God was the basic requirement of a *satyāgrahi* and needed to be stressed explicitly.

In a letter to an inmate of his Sabarmati *āśram*, he makes an interesting observation. The person was arguing about who was right and who was wrong on a certain matter. Gandhi in reply notes:

*A satyāgrahi, moreover, never demands justice. Justice means "measure for measure". Satyāgraha means truth against cunning, non-violence against violence, forbearance against anger and love against hatred. Where, in such satyāgraha, is room for dealing out justice?*²⁹⁰

Observe here that he says it is not a question of demanding justice, it is not to perpetrate evil against evil or tit for tat, but rather to place truth before the person practising untruth and let truth triumph. This too was what he had been practising implicitly during the previous stage. Here he only makes it more explicit. He speaks from his South African experience. It is an honourable fight and at the conclusion of it, there must be joy and peace: "I would like the fight to be conducted honourably on either side so that at the end of it either party may be able to say of the other that there was no malice behind its action".²⁹¹ This means that the *satyāgrahi* is ever considerate to the other and is ready to acknowledge his own error and make concession to the other:

*... it is a satyāgrahi's duty to regard his own errors as big as a mountain though they might be as small as a mole, and another's as small as mole though they might be as big as a mountain. Such an attitude comes naturally to a satyāgrahi and is not the result of a conscious effort.*²⁹²

Thus, he was ready for a dialogue always and ready for a compromise, to meet the opponent half way or more! This also is not new. He had acted in a similar way in South Africa in his dealings with Gen. Smuts. In 1931, he

²⁸⁹ Navajivan, February 17, 1929, in CW XL (1929) no. 8, p. 6.

²⁹⁰ Letter to Premabehn Katak on July 26, 1931, in CW XLVII (1931) no. 242, p. 217.

²⁹¹ Letter to Sir Sykes, the Governor of Bombay, on January 23, 1932, in CW XLIX (1932) no. 31, p. 20.

²⁹² Navajivan, August 2, 1931, in CW XLVII (1931) no. 275, p. 244.

had reached a compromise with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin but some Congressmen did not like it. They wished that Gandhi had refused to meet or cooperate with the Viceroy. Gandhi defended his action:

*It is a principle of **satyāgraha** that if there is an opportunity for talks with the party against whom **satyāgraha** is being offered, then talks should be tried. We should strive to win over by love the person whom we consider our enemy. To conquer him in this manner should be the **satyāgrahi's** resolve. If he does not possess this attribute but harbours enmity, jealousy and hatred in his heart, then he cannot be called a **satyāgrahi** but a **durāgrahi** [one who perseveres with an evil insistence and intent].²⁹³*

It is part of a process of awakening the sleeping conscience of the oppressor to the fundamental goodness, truth that resides in himself, though he is unconscious of it. This was not new but what he had been saying all along even during the previous two stages that we have considered. Thus writing in a letter to Reginald Reynolds, who was championing the Indian cause in England through his vigorous writings, he reminds him of this:

*Remember too that **satyāgraha** is a method of carrying conviction and of converting by an appeal to reason and to the sympathetic chord in human beings. It relies upon the ultimate good in every human being, no matter how debased he may be for the time being.²⁹⁴*

He explains the inner dynamics of this process to an English audience during his visit to London in 1931. The appeal, he says, is not to reason alone but to the heart and the means is self-suffering:

... things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering. Suffering is the law of human being; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason. Nobody has probably drawn up more petitions or espoused more forlorn cases than I, and I have come to this fundamental conclusion that, if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. Suffering is the badge of the human race, not the sword.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Speech on March 30, 1931 at Karachi Congress, **Hindi Navajivan**, April 6, 1931, in **CW XLV** (1930-1931) no. 413, p. 364-365 (parenthesis is mine).

²⁹⁴ Letter of February 23, 1931, in **CW XLV** (1930-1931) no. 296, p. 222.

²⁹⁵ Speech at Birmingham, England on October 18, 1931, **Young India**, November 5, 1931, in **CW XLVIII** (1931-1932) no. 133, p. 189.

At the same time, he is conscious that the conviction of one's inner strength and power of liberation must come from within. One must become aware of it:

*To establish the farmer's ownership of the land, there is only one way; and that is to teach him the **mantra** [powerful magical formula or prayer] of **satyāgraha**. This is a power which is inherent in everyone. The farmer has only to be aware of this power.²⁹⁶*

This is, at the same time, the limitation of **satyāgraha**. If the person who is suffering injustice does not realize this power, the **satyāgrahi** can do nothing except suffer with him and hope for the awareness to dawn in the victims:

*... if the person who is the victim of injustice has no strength in himself, there is no means of helping him. This is a limitation inherent in the nature of **satyāgraha**. **Satyāgraha** aims at providing an object-lesson to victims of oppression so that they may be roused to struggle and deliver themselves from the oppression. The **satyāgrahi** has to keep patience till the victim is so roused. If this is a limitation of **satyāgraha**, it is also its special excellence. A **satyāgrahi** presumes to be nobody's guardian. He suffers with the victim of oppression and thereby becomes his equal and shares his suffering.²⁹⁷*

As in the previous stages, here too he insists on the **satyāgrahis'** readiness to die and die not with anger but with blessings on the murderer.²⁹⁸

Now we turn to his notion of **ahimsā**. During this stage, he continues his efforts at understanding the implications of the law or nature and working (**dharma** of **ahimsā**) of non-violence better and seeks ways and means of presenting it to others. As at the previous stages, it remained for him an ideal and he felt that it would be impossible to describe it adequately. One grows in the knowledge and practice of **ahimsā** which seems to acquire new meanings according to the different situations one faces in one's life.

Is **ahimsā** to be considered as a passive principle? Is it the same as what Tolstoy had understood? To questions such as these, he replies while on a visit to Lausanne on December 8, 1931 that whereas for Tolstoy resistance meant passive non-resistance, he (Gandhi) had gone further:

²⁹⁶ **Hindi Navajivan**, March 27, 1930, in **CW XLIII** (1930) no. 135, p. 139 (parenthesis is mine).

²⁹⁷ **Navajivan**, July 19, 1931, in **CW XLVII** (1931) no. 182, p. 154 (emphasis is mine).

²⁹⁸ Cf. **Navajivan**, March 23, 1930, in **CW XLIII** (1930) no. 94, p. 93-94.

It has often been said that the doctrine of non-violence I owe to Tolstoy. It is not the whole truth, but there again I derive the greatest strength from his writings. But as Tolstoy himself admitted, the non-resistance method I had cultivated and elaborated in South Africa was different from the non-resistance Tolstoy had written upon and recommended. This I say in no derogation of Tolstoy's fame. He is not an apt pupil who will not build upon foundation laid by his teacher for him. He only deserves a good teacher who would add to the legacy that teacher would leave for him. I should be an unworthy son to my father if I should not add to my inheritance, and so I have always regarded it as a matter of pride that, thanks to God, what I had learned from Tolstoy has fructified a hundred fold. Tolstoy talked of passive resistance largely, but non-resistance elaborated in Transvaal was a force infinitely more active than resistance that an armed man can devise.²⁹⁹

Thus *ahimsā* meant action but this action is to be understood in the sense of *Gītā*.³⁰⁰ It is to be an action without attachment to the fruits thereof (*niṣ-kāmakarma*). And action of some sort is necessary:

Ahimsā without action is an impossibility. Action does not merely mean activity of hands and feet. Every thought is an action. There can be no ahimsā in the absence of thought. The dharma of ahimsā has been conceived only for an embodied being like man.³⁰¹

He also tries to clarify the difference as well as the connection between *ahimsā* and compassion. A correspondent had identified them. Gandhi in his reply notes:

There is as much difference between ahimsā and compassion as there is between gold and the shape given to it, between root and the tree which sprouts from it. Where there is no compassion, there is no ahimsā. The test of ahimsā is compassion. The concrete form of ahimsā is compassion. Hence it is said there is as much ahimsā as there is compassion. If I refrain from beating up a man who comes to attack me, it may or may not be ahimsā. If I refrain from hitting him out of fear it is not ahimsā. If I abstain from hitting him out of compassion and with full knowledge, it is ahimsā.³⁰²

Ahimsā is also connected with humility. Accordingly, he gives an example to one of his *āśramites*:

Non-violence is humbler than even a mango tree. It is said that a mango tree bends as it grows up. When non-violence grows fully, it acts like a

²⁹⁹ CW XLVIII (1931-1932) no. 259, p. 407.

³⁰⁰ Cf. above, ch. I, footnote 101.

³⁰¹ Navajivan, March 31, 1929, in CW XL (1929) no. 174, p. 191-192.

³⁰² Navajivan, March 31, 1929, in CW XL (1929) no. 174, p. 192.

*cipher. Instead of attempting to prove its own point, non-violence lets everyone else prove his.*³⁰³

Ahiṃsā also meant that one is non-violent even in thoughts and above all self-interests: "Non-violence means not harming anyone in thought, word or action out of ill will or selfishness. If we wish or do ill to any stranger in the interest of our parents, that is violence".³⁰⁴ He also distinguishes between superficial *ahiṃsā* and the subtle *ahiṃsā*. The superficial one is concerned with avoiding external injury to or killing of a human being, whereas the subtle one extends to even thoughts and words wherewith we do not harm any human being and this subtle *ahiṃsā* could extend even to other animate and inanimate beings: "In normal circumstances the idea of non-violence is limited to man only. But truly speaking there is no limit at all".³⁰⁵

Speaking to volunteers at Bangalore on August 28, 1927, he describes *ahiṃsā* as the highest form of loving service which makes one ready to lay down one's life for others:

*Sacrifice means laying down one's life so that others may live. Let us suffer, so that others may be happy and the highest love is wherein man lays down his life for his fellowmen. That highest love is ahiṃsā which is the highest service.*³⁰⁶

Ahiṃsā as love he considered as the very law of our being, enabling us to triumph over death.³⁰⁷ In an interview given to an American Black delegation on February 2, 1936, he speaks of *ahiṃsā* as love but tries to distinguish it from St. Paul's notion of love as portrayed in ICor 13:1-13 and as he understood it:

It [ahiṃsā] is a force which is more positive than electricity and more powerful than ether. At the centre of non-violence is a force which is self-acting. Ahiṃsā means "love" in the Pauline sense, and yet something more than "love" defined by St. Paul, although I know St. Paul's beautiful definition is good enough for all practical purposes. Ahiṃsā includes the whole creation, and not only human. Besides, love in the English language has other connotations too, and so I was compelled to use the nega-

³⁰³ Letter to Balkrishna, in CW XXXIV (1927) no. 330, p. 356.

³⁰⁴ Letter to Bal Kalelkar, September 2, 1927, in CW XXXIV (1927) no. 398, p. 437.

³⁰⁵ Letter on March 19, 1941 to Ghulam Rasul Qureshi (who was trying to follow the *asram* way of life), in CW LXXIII (1940-1941) no. 522, p. 385.

³⁰⁶ *Young India*, September 8, 1927, in CW XXXIV (1927) no. 377, p. 410.

³⁰⁷ CW LXIII (1936) no. 402, p. 320-321.

tive word. But it does not, as I have told you, express a negative force, but a force superior to all the forces put together.³⁰⁸

He also tries to describe ahimsā as benevolence instead of 'love':

*Non-violence in its positive aspect as benevolence – I do not use the word love as it has fallen into disrepute – is the greatest force because of the limitless scope it affords to self-suffering without causing or intending any physical or material injury to the wrong-doer.*³⁰⁹

He perceived clearly the difference in consequences for the *swarāj* (independence) of India if it were to come through violence or through non-violence. He would wish that it comes through non-violence because then it would be peaceful, lasting and divine in a way:

*There are two alternatives before us. The one is that of violence, the other of non-violence; the one of physical strength, the other of soul-force; the one of hatred, the other of love; the one of disorder, the other of peace; one that is demoniac, the other that is godly ... If we want *swarāj* we shall have to strive hard and follow one of these two courses. As they are incompatible with each other, the fruit, the *swarāj* that would be secured by following the one would necessarily be different from that which would be secured by following the other. In either case the result will be known as *swarāj* but its contents would be different in the two cases. We shall reap as we sow.*³¹⁰

Hatred, he considered, is a form of violence. So, when he heard of a violent attack by a group of reformers on one from among the orthodox, he undertook a seven days' purificatory fast. At the conclusion of it he notes:

*The fast was undertaken to impress upon the workers the truth that we can only win over the opponent by love, never by hate. Hate is the subtlest form of violence. We cannot be really non-violent and yet have hate in us. The dullest brain cannot fail to perceive that it is impossible by violence to wean millions of caste Hindus from the evil of untouchability, which they have hitherto been taught to regard as an article of faith.*³¹¹

He wanted that violence be avoided even in words. But at times it could happen that unconsciously we offend others in our words. In that case our good intention could be justified only by the good results produced. Thus one of the *āśramites* had complained that his words had hurt her:

³⁰⁸ CW LXII (1935-1936) no. 247, p. 200 (parenthesis is mine).

³⁰⁹ CW LXXVI (1942) no. 356, p. 318.

³¹⁰ Navajivan, September 9, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 292, p. 250-251.

³¹¹ CW LVIII (1934) no. 327, p. 309-310.

*I must have replied to you as I felt at that moment. I can understand that my words did not produce a good impression on you. That is a measure of the imperfection of my own non-violence ... Truth stated in a spirit of non-violence may hurt at the moment but its ultimate effect must be as sweet as amṛit [nectar].*³¹²

But loss of temper, he would consider, is violence and not to be employed even with the purpose of doing good to the one who is hurt.

Ahimsā meant not to hurt any living creature by thought, word or deed, even for the supposed benefit of that creature ... What about our being angry with one another? ... a man losing temper in his intercourse with equals, all these are guilty of violence, and violence of a bad type which is not easy to tackle ... although to sever some person's head from his body for the sake of the country or the family or oneself is indeed a violent act, the subtle violence involved in injuring the feelings of other people day in and day out is possibly very much worse than that. Murders committed in the world will seem numerous when considered by themselves and not so numerous when compared with the number of deaths due to other causes; but the subtle violence involved in daily loss of temper and the like defies all attempt at calculation.³¹³

Thus, when Reginald Reynolds, an Englishman had taken the side of Gandhi and violently counter-attacked a write-up in **The Indian Daily Mail** through a reply in **The Chronicle**, Gandhi advised him to apologize: "Why should you spoil a good cause by bad adjectives? ... It is the underlying violence that worries me".³¹⁴ He makes also an interesting distinction between mental violence and mental non-violence and compares their respective efficiency: "Mental violence has no potency and injures only the person whose thoughts are violent. It is otherwise with mental non-violence. It has potency which the world does not yet know. And what I want is non-violence of thought and deed".³¹⁵ Similarly, he would not like hasty generalizations regarding the character of others from just one incident. This too, would be a form of violence. Thus, his secretary Mahadev Desai had judged that a certain person had been curt. Gandhi told him:

No proposition can be called universal unless it is proved so by analysis and synthesis. We know that water consists of two parts of hydrogen and

³¹² Letter to Premabehn Kantak, February 25, 1932, in **CW XLIX** (1932) no. 172, p. 157 (parenthesis is mine).

³¹³ **CW L** (1932) no. 206, p. 205-206.

³¹⁴ Letter of March 31, 1930, in **CW XLIII** (1930) no. 150, p. 159.

³¹⁵ An interview with English Pacifists on January 20, 1940, in **CW LXXI** (1939-1940) no. 131, p. 108.

one part of oxygen. But we must prove that by synthesis and analysis. If we analyze water we get two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen. However we should synthesize two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen and if that produces water, our proposition about its composition is proved. The same applies to our day-to-day behaviour. We cannot jump to the conclusion about a certain thing, even though it be as clear as daylight, without examining hundreds of facts which may prove it wrong. It certainly violates truth and in being uncharitable towards others we violate truth and in being uncharitable towards others we violate *ahimsā* too. We who tread the path of *ahimsā* should take each step with great care. It is not that I am unaware of his faults. May be you are justified in finding him curt in this particular instance but to believe that he is always so betrays lack of charity on your part.³¹⁶

By 1942, he made a slight change in his opinion regarding non-violence in thought. He found that it is very difficult for masses to achieve this and so he could not wait to launch his last struggle before the masses have reached such a stage.

*This time I have also made a slight change in my concept of non-violence. In 1920 and 1930 I had laid down that observance of *ahimsā* in thought, word and deed was indispensable. Now I feel that it is not right to expect four hundred million people to accept this view and to wait till they do. Now I only tell them to abstain from violence in word and deed.*³¹⁷

This, of course, does not mean that he had given up the ideal nor did he lessen the demand on his close followers. He also had noted much earlier that the belief and practice of *ahimsā*, is not achieved in one day. It is a process and sometimes a long drawn one, progressing according to the various situations one meets:

*... there is that difference between a belief in *ahimsā* and a belief in *himsā* which there is between North and South, life and death. One who hooks his fortunes to *ahimsā*, the law of love, daily lessens the circles of destruction and to that extent promotes life and love; he who swears by *himsā* [hurt], the law of hate, daily widens the circle of hate.*³¹⁸

During a discussion with students at Calcutta in 1934, he was asked about the question of inequalities between the haves and the have-nots and

³¹⁶ Harijanbandhu, July 20, 1940, in CW LXXII (1940) no. 269, p. 209.

³¹⁷ Letter to Vinoba Bhave on July 26, 1942, in CW LXXVI (1942) no. 374, p. 333.

³¹⁸ Harijan, June 22, 1935, in CW LXI (1935) no. 271, 191 (word in parenthesis is mine). The context is also interesting to note. He had advocated, during a speech to the people of Borsad that they should kill rats and fleas. Some protested because this meant violence. Gandhi's contention was that one cannot become violent or non-violent in a day. To-day it was expedient to act this way, perhaps later when we have grown in non-violence we could act in a different manner!

the need to find a solution for class-struggle, even if necessary, by violent means. He reacted:

*Let us not be obsessed with catchwords and seductive slogans imported from the West. Have we not our distinct Eastern traditions? ... All that comes from the West on this subject is tarred with the brush of violence. I object to it because I have seen the wreckage that lies at the end of this road. The more thinking set, even in the West today, stand aghast at the abyss for which their system is heading. And I owe whatever influence I have in the West to my ceaseless endeavour to find a solution which promises an escape from this vicious circle of violence and exploitation.*³¹⁹

His solution was based on *ahimsā*, an attitude of being one family among employers and employees, land-lords and peasants, capitalists and labourers.³²⁰ He was not very much for the method of boycott and considered it to be ineffective and prone to violence. He would rather call his method: non-co-operation tinged with love.³²¹ If at all he used the concept of boycott, he qualified it with his own understanding of *ahimsā*. Accordingly, in preparation for the Civil Disobedience of 1930, he counsels villagers, explaining to them the implications of, and limits to the boycotts in villages. He says that the village headman and his people ought to non-cooperate with the Government officials. They ought not to supply them with food, water, accommodation or give any other facility even when demanded *but* if any such person is hungry, thirsty or sick and asks as a human being, then they ought to help him and nurse him as if he were their own relative.³²²

Now we turn our attention to the power of *ahimsā* and how genuine non-violence works in practice. Gandhi held that it works more efficiently than violence and that too in an invisible manner, becoming visible only at the end. Thus in an interview to professor Mays, an American Black, around January 10, 1937:

... the effect of our action is often more potent when it is not patently known. The unconscious effect you are making on me I may never know. It is nevertheless, infinitely greater than the conscious effect. In violence there is nothing invisible. Non-violence, on the other hand, is three-fourths invisible, so the effect is in the reverse ratio to its invisibility. Non-violence, when it becomes active, travels with extraordinary ve-

³¹⁹ CW LVIII (1934) no. 245, p. 219.

³²⁰ Cf. above, ch. III, p. 167.

³²¹ Cf. above, ch. II, p. 78.

³²² CW XLIII (1930) no. 145, p. 150f, cf. also CW XXXVI (1928) no. 133, p. 115.

*locity, and then it becomes a miracle. So the mass mind is affected first unconsciously, then consciously. When it becomes consciously affected this is demonstrable victory.*³²³

The way its efficiency spreads is also mysterious. If it becomes established in one place, it will spread to the others. Thus speaking to Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan who was affectionately known as frontier Gandhi (he was a Pathan working in the North Western Frontier Province, following Gandhian principles), he explains:

*It [non-violence] is self-acting. The soul persists after death, its existence does not depend on the body. Similarly, non-violence or soul-force too, does not need physical aids for its propagation or effect. It acts independently of them. It transcends time and space. It follows, therefore, that if non-violence becomes successfully established in one place, its influence will spread everywhere.*³²⁴

Gandhi Seva Sangh consisted of die-hard followers of Gandhi from 1920 onwards. Faced with growing Hindu-Muslim riots, he felt the time was approaching when he had to use these volunteers in an experiment to stop such riots by being ready to sacrifice their lives. However, he tells them during a meeting on March 27, 1938:

*This does not mean that they should simply go and get killed. No doubt they should lay down their lives. But they must also think whether they are doing so in anger or out of love. If they do not have love in their hearts, their laying down their lives is pointless.*³²⁵

An editorial in **The Statesman** appeared, criticizing Gandhi for holding on to the efficacy of non-violence when in practice it was being proved ineffective. The editorial cited the examples of Pastor Niemöller and Carl Osietzky who in spite of their non-violence had not succeeded in converting the heart of Herr Hitler who had them shut up in prison. Gandhi replied through **Harijan** on January 7, 1939:

Every action is a resultant of a multitude of forces even of a contrary nature. There is no waste of energy. So we learn in the books on mechanics. This is equally true of human actions. The difference is that in the one case we generally know the forces at work, and when we do, we can mathematically foretell the resultant. In the case of human actions, the result from a concurrence of forces, of most of which we have no knowl-

³²³ CW LXIV (1936-1937) no. 249, p. 222-223.

³²⁴ CW LXVIII (1938-1939) no. 33, p. 29 (parenthesis is mine).

³²⁵ CW LXVI (1937-1938) no. 520, p. 434; cf. also March 26, 1938, in CW LXVI (1937-1938) no. 519, p. 432-433.

*edge. But our ignorance must not be made to serve the cause of disbelief in the power of these forces. Rather is our ignorance a cause for greater faith. And non-violence being the mightiest force in the world and also the most elusive in its working, it demands the greatest exercise of faith. Even as we believe in God in faith, so have we to believe in non-violence in faith.*³²⁶

To a further accusation by **The Statesman** that Christ also had surely failed in the worldly sense, Gandhi defends Jesus:

*Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal. And I know that there are hundreds of Christians who believe likewise. Jesus lived and died in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole life by the eternal Law of love.*³²⁷

A little earlier another example had been cited: the example of Jews in Nazi camps. The question was asked whether they had not been non-violent all through 2,000 years of persecution and what has it effected for them. Gandhi replied that the effect was lost because they had kept and keep anger within them against their persecutors.³²⁸ To this, the Jews gave their rejoinder but Gandhi replied reasserting his position.³²⁹ The validity of what Gandhi had said, he was to experience shortly and very concretely. In the first half of 1939, Gandhi became involved in a mini *satyāgraha* struggle in the tiny state of Rajkot where his father had once been the Prime Minister and where he himself had been to school and it was also the native state of his wife Kasturba. The people were agitating for a popular government similar to what the British Provinces were beginning to have. The Congress supported them. The ruler had finally come to a compromise and made promises but then, due to the advice of his adviser Durbar Virawala, had gone back upon his promises. Gandhi did not like this breach of promise and encouraged the *satyāgrahis* to resume the struggle. The ruler held that he had not broken any promise. Many were arrested, including Kasturba Gandhi. Finally, Gandhi undertook an indefinite fast. The Viceroy intervened on Gandhi's appeal for adjudication and the fast ended. The Chief Justice appointed for adjudication, ruled in favour of Gandhi. Yet the ruler,

³²⁶ CW LXVIII (1938-1939) no. 313, p. 277.

³²⁷ CW LXVIII (1938-1939) no. 313, p. 278.

³²⁸ CW LXVIII (1938-1939) no. 225, p. 191-193.

³²⁹ CW LXVIII (1938-1939) no. 422, p. 381-382.

egged on by his adviser, still managed to hold on in such a manner as not to yield. Meetings with the ruler as well as the adviser followed but the stalemate could not be broken. Even sporting offers by Gandhi could not effect a change. The Durbar Virawala had only bitterness and contempt for the state *satyāgrahis*. Gandhi was surprised by this unexpected reaction. He began to think deeply and finally discovered the reason. Gandhi, in hidden anger and resentment, had spoken disparagingly of Durbar Virawala and had tolerated other Congressmen and *satyāgrahis* doing likewise. This lack of love for Durbar Virawala had mysteriously prevented this *satyāgraha* from achieving its expected result. It was not a genuine *satyāgraha*. He had also made a mistake by appealing to the Viceroy rather than appealing to the fundamental goodness in the ruler and his adviser. Acknowledging his mistake and conceding victory to the Durbar Virawala and making an appeal to the ruler to deal justly with his subjects, he withdrew.³³⁰ Speaking of it later to Gandhi Seva Sangh members and drawing a parallel to their behaviour in the Congress meeting, he asks them:

*Can you truthfully say that you have followed non-violence within the Congress? Did you bare your chests to the arrows of your opponents? Did you not try to turn and shoot them in this direction and that? Did we welcome criticism from others? No, we challenged it with our tongues. We were pleased when other people criticized the critics. All this is a sign of violence.*³³¹

Thus his conviction grew about the efficacy of *genuine satyāgraha*. For such a genuine *satyāgraha* no organization is needed. Thus to a suggestion that he found an out-and-out group of believers in non-violence to lead his *satyāgraha*, he replies through **Harijan** on August 19, 1940: "A man or woman who is saturated with *ahimsā* has only to will a thing and it happens. I can picture this truth in my imagination. It is stated in the Scriptures too".³³² Gandhi felt that he himself had not reached that standard of excellence in a permanent fashion. He had but reached it sporadically and thus succeeded in his undertakings. However, he could not sustain it longer and thus at other times he felt it was not enough for the success desired. Ultimately, however, it is a reliance on the power of God:

³³⁰ Cf. statement to the Press on April 24, 1939, in **CW LXIX** (1939) no. 209, p. 168-171.

³³¹ **CW LXIX** (1939) no. 231, p. 194; cf. also p. 191-194.

³³² **CW LXXII** (1940) no. 434, p. 381.

*The fact is that non-violence does not work in the same way as violence. It works in the opposite way. An armed man naturally relies upon his arms. A man who is intentionally unarmed relies upon the unseen force called God by poets, but called the unknown by scientists. But that which is unknown is not necessarily non-existent. God is the Force among all forces known and unknown. Non-violence without reliance upon that Force is poor stuff fit to be thrown in the dust.*³³³

Thus by the end of July 1942 he was ready to throw caution to the winds and start his supposed final campaign of 'Quit India'.³³⁴ If non-violence were to change into violence of some sort, it is also part of God's will:

*Supposing a non-violent struggle has been started at my behest and later on there is an outbreak of violence, I will put up with that too, because eventually it is God who is inspiring me and things will shape as He wills. If He wants to destroy the world through violence using me as His instrument, how can I prevent it? He is so subtle that it is beyond man to know Him. Though electricity is a subtle power, we can certainly find something about it. But God is still subtler and all pervading. All that we can say about Him is that it is a Power at whose bidding everything goes on. But it is impossible to find out what that Power is. We can only put our faith in Him and it is that faith that is moving me.*³³⁵

This statement may surprise us but we should pay attention here to the context. It was at the height of World War II; the Japanese were on the frontiers and the Congressmen were restless and were getting dissatisfied with Gandhi's delaying tactics and his policy of not embarrassing the British during the time of the war. All appeals to them had failed. Gandhi's own doctrine of non-violence was on trial.

He had been confident all along that somehow the masses could be trained in the school of ahimsā and so he had waited till 1942. Early during this stage, he had reconciled himself to a minimum that the masses may accept non-violence at least as a policy though for him and for his die-hard followers it was a creed. Thus in 1928, after the Independence Resolution by the Congress, he had already declared:

But my creed is non-violence under all circumstances ... I know that method to be infallible. I know that a whole people can adopt it without ac-

³³³ *Harijan*, June 28, 1942, in *CW LXXVI* (1942) no. 271, p. 232.

³³⁴ Cf. above, p. 109-110.

³³⁵ *CW LXXVI* (1942) no. 374, p. 334.

*cepting it as its creed and without understanding its philosophy. People generally do not understand the philosophy of all their acts.*³³⁶

Two years later, his hopes had risen. He was confident that the masses could be trained in non-violence. The basis for him was human nature. He felt that non-violence was natural for man. The Lahore Congress had declared independence as the immediate aim of the Congress and had authorized Gandhi to organize mass Civil Disobedience. But his critics were not so sure about him. They asked him whether he would suspend the movement after it is launched just as he had suspended the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921 due to an outbreak of violence. They were sure that he would have to do so since training the masses for non-violence is a near impossibility. He replied through **Young India**, on January 2, 1930:

*This is, in my opinion, a gross self-deception. If mankind was not habitually non-violent, it would have been self-destroyed ages ago. But in the duel between forces of violence and non-violence, the latter have always come out victorious in the end. The truth is that we have not had patience enough to wait and apply ourselves whole-heartedly to the spread of non-violence among the people as a means for political ends.*³³⁷

He considered non-violence to be the greatest gift of God and it belongs to all peoples and not to any select groups:

*I hold it to be the greatest gift of God. And all God's gifts are common heritage of His creation and not a monopoly of cloistered monks or nuns. They may specialize in non-violence, they may teach us its wonderful effects, but if their discoveries and their claims are sound they must be adaptable by masses. If truth be not a monopoly of the few why should non-violence, its counterpart, be otherwise?*³³⁸

He was insistent that Congressmen should accept, like him, non-violence, as creed and not merely as a policy: "If all make *ahiṃsā* a policy, and I remain the only votary of it as a creed, we can make very little progress".³³⁹ But in 1942, he had reached the point of taking a calculated risk. He had waited long enough. He had done what he could, now let God do the rest!

³³⁶ **Young India**, January 12, 1928, in **CW XXXV** (1927-1928) no. 345, p. 457.

³³⁷ **CW XLII** (1929-1930) no. 351, p. 363.

³³⁸ **Young India**, April 24, 1930, in **CW XLIII** (1930) no. 309, p. 309.

³³⁹ **CW XLII** (1929-1930) no. 380, p. 395-396.

Regarding his attitude towards wars: V. Tcherkoff, a pacifist, friend and follower of Tolstoy had written in 1928, asking how Gandhi, following non-violence could justify his earlier participation in war. Similarly a certain Rev. B. de Ligt had also begun to question him on this and continued the controversy till 1930.³⁴⁰ His answer had followed more or less the lines he had adopted during the previous stage, namely: the non-violence he preached was a non-violence of strength; unarmed, weak India must first acquire the capacity to use arms before voluntarily laying them down; they should not be considered cowardly and non-violent because of incapacity for anything else. Finally, Gandhi admitted also his own weakness and acknowledged a development of his ideas from a weaker, narrower non-violence to a stronger, more extensive non-violence. Regarding the arms he was asked already in 1931, what was the cure for evil of armaments and he answered that the cure was:

*... by non-violence, which will eventually be the weapon of all nations. I say "eventually" deliberately, because we shall have wars and armaments for a long time. It is two thousands years since Christ preached His Sermon on the Mount and the world has adopted only a fragment of the imperishable lofty precepts therein enunciated for the conduct of man towards man. Until we take all Christ's principles to our hearts, war, hatred and violence will continue.*³⁴¹

On the eve of World War II, he wrote an appeal to Hitler and during the war he wrote to him again. The Government did not send the letter. He also wrote twice "appeal to every Briton" advocating non-violence. He even offered to go and meet Hitler at the height of the war when the Allies were on the run. He wanted to end the meaningless carnage. When Japan entered the war and reached the door-steps of India, he made an appeal to Japan also. He was very critical about the scorched earth policy followed by Russia and opposed it when it was rumoured that the British India Government would follow a similar policy if the Japanese advanced:

I see neither bravery nor sacrifice in destroying life or property for offence or defence. I would far rather leave, if I must, my crops and homestead for the enemy to use than to destroy them for the sake of preventing their use by him. There is reason, sacrifice and even bravery in so leav-

³⁴⁰ Cf. CW XXXIX (1929) no. 20, p. 423-424; CW XXXVII(1928) no. 305, p. 270-271; CW XLII (1929-1930) no. 415, p. 436-437.

³⁴¹ CW XLV (1930-1931) no. 384, p. 319.

*ing my homestead and crops, if I do so not out of fear but because I refuse to regard anyone as my enemy—that is, out of humanitarian motive.*³⁴²

When a reader protested against this strange opinion, he further insisted on it and tried to show how it is a part of the love we owe to our enemies:

*There is no bravery in my poisoning my well or filling it in so that my brother who is at war with me may not use the water ... I do claim that there are bravery and sacrifice in my leaving my wells, crops and homesteads intact, bravery in that I deliberately run the risk of the enemy feeding himself at my expense and pursuing me, and sacrifice in that the sentiment of leaving something for the enemy purifies and ennobles me.*³⁴³

During the war, the Congress found itself wavering from one alternative to the other. Congress in its impatience had absolved Gandhi from leading the campaign for freedom and had passed in July 1940 the resolution of C. Rajagopalachari whereby they adopted a policy of non-violence to achieve independence but violence if need be to repel the external aggression and even active cooperation with the British for the same. Gandhi then experienced qualms of conscience for allowing the Congress to go ahead with such a resolution which had in it violence as an element. Next month, he was back in the lead and had a different resolution tabled and passed. But in December 1941, the Congress gave its own interpretation of the new resolution and Gandhi had to give up the leadership of the proposed Civil Disobedience. He was, however, back in action within a few months and made those who were for any form of violence to resign from the Congress. In this battle of wits, Gandhi's one concern was for non-violence and he had to uphold it against even some of his colleagues and friends who had panicked at the approach of the Japanese. For Gandhi the course was clear, his non-violence was not a policy but a creed. Anyhow, it remains true that Gandhi's non-violence was not fully tested by a wholesale invasion of India by the Japanese. But it is to his credit that he held on to it even under changed circumstances.³⁴⁴

Before we conclude this consideration of Gandhi's concept of *ahimsā* at this stage, a few minor points could be noted. For him, *brahmaçārya* (celibacy) was intimately connected with *ahimsā* because he felt that only such

³⁴² Harijan, March 22, 1942, in CW LXXV (1941-1942) no. 493, p. 409.

³⁴³ Harijan, April 12, 1942, in CW LXXVI (1942) no. 15, p. 13.

³⁴⁴ Cf. above, p. 107-109.

a person could truly practise *ahimsā* or universal love. Thus writing from prison to his *āśram*, a talk to be read at Tuesday prayer, he notes:

*We find that fulfilment of ahimsā is impossible without perfect brahmaçārya. Ahimsā means universal love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or even a woman to one man, what is there left for all the world besides? It simply means, "we two first, and the devil take all the rest of them". As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice all for the sake of her husband, and a faithful husband for the sake of his wife, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of universal love, or look upon all mankind as kith and kin. For they have created a boundary wall or one has been created round their love. The larger their family, the farther are they from universal love. We see this in the whole world. Hence, one who would obey the law of ahimsā cannot marry, not to speak of gratification outside the marital bond ... Then what about people who are already married? Will they never be able to realize Truth? Can they never offer their all at the altar of humanity? There is a way out for them ... If the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service.*³⁴⁵

This was the ideal and going through the bulk of correspondence one can well imagine the struggle of those couples who joined Gandhi at the *āśram* for service. Gandhi sent them off separately to far distant places to engage themselves in different forms of service such as *khādi* or Harijan work and recommended control of the palate. For Gandhi, *ahimsā* was very broad and permeated the whole of one's life. Hence reacting to a bicycle accident involving an *āśramite*, he says to him in a letter on January 28, 1940:

*A carpenter will always keep his tools ready for use. A typist will keep his typewriter in good repair and a rider will keep his horse in good stead. Similarly a bicycle should always be kept clean, oiled and ready for use. Otherwise don't have a bicycle at all. I cannot tolerate an accident caused by carelessness on your part. Such things are included in ahimsā.*³⁴⁶

One can notice here the attitude he recommends towards things also besides the attitude we should have towards human beings and all living beings.

In the previous stage he had been attacked for counselling the destruction of stray dogs. In 1928, he was once again in a similar controversy for a number of months and received a number of abusive letters and he patiently answered some of them through *Young India* and *Navajivan*. The controversy was: he had put to death a calf at the Sabarmati *āśram* when it was suffering and in obvious pain and there was no chance of any recovery;

³⁴⁵ Letter of August 3, 1930, in CW XLIV (1930) no. 101, p. 68-69.

³⁴⁶ Letter to Kanu Gandhi, in CW LXXI (1939-1940) no. 188, p. 153.

the other was, to get rid of the monkey nuisance, he had allowed them to be chased off by using violence, if found necessary. Gandhi's main line of defence was that in life some degree of violence is inevitable and we should only try to minimize it; sometimes some actions are only apparently violent but their intention is non-violence. Some correspondents then asked whether euthanasia could be permitted. Gandhi asked them not to extend what he had said about animals because in the case of animals there is no question of consent being asked. In the case of human beings the points to be considered would be: consent of the person; recovery is definitely beyond expectation (Gandhi thought that this is not easy to decide); no further service is possible by the person (his very suffering and patience could be a service); no service could be rendered to him (an incurable baby can be still held in the hand and comforted to the extent possible, thought Gandhi); the person is prepared for dying as a human being with courage, faith and love (the case of a certain Parchure Shastri, an *āśramite*, many years a leper and who wanted to fast unto death and Gandhi would say, "yes" to him); and no selfishness is involved. This problem need not detain us long. Gandhi was probing to find a tenable position in accord with his principle of *ahimsā* and he has to be understood in the context of his own attitude towards life.³⁴⁷

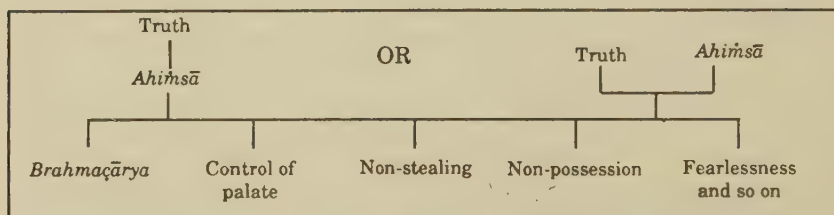
As in the previous stage, here too, Gandhi says that Truth is the goal while *ahimsā* is the means. He stresses the close connection between the

³⁴⁷ A few interesting references in this connection: CW XXXVII (1928) no. 43, p. 33; no. 73, p. 58; no. 408, p. 361-362; no. 434, p. 382-384; no. 341, p. 297-298; no. 354, p. 313-314; CW XXXVIII (1928-1929) no. 82, p. 66-67. Especially note *Young India*, April 14, 1927, in CW XXXIII (1927) no. 244, p. 232-233, where he discusses the question of a certain Dr. Harold Blazer (the case was adduced by a correspondent to justify mercy killing) who had chloroformed his daughter because he felt that no one would care for this retarded girl after his own death. He had been acquitted by the judge. Gandhi commenting on this says: "... considered from the strictly moral point of view Dr. Blazer was wrong. My correspondent in his utilitarian zeal has overlooked the frightful consequences and implications of the doctrine he lays down ... I wonder whether my correspondent will have all the lepers, the blind, the deaf, one fine night to be chloroformed to sweet, everlasting sleep. And yet Damien was a leper and Milton was a blind poet. Man is not all body but he is something infinitely higher", and in CW XXXVII (1928) no. 434, p. 384, we note: "It is my firm conviction that the principle of clinging to life in all circumstances betrays cowardice and is the cause of much of the *himsā* that goes on around us ... to hang on to life at all costs seems to me the very height of selfishness". Cf. also THEKKINEDATH, J., *Love of Neighbour in Mahatma Gandhi*, Alwaye (India), 1973, p. 111-113 and p. 201, where he says that Gandhi approved of euthanasia. But I feel that Gandhi was not for a wholesale euthanasia. Distinction would have to be made. When we consider all the conditions and qualification he makes, it appears to be a type of euthanasia which could be condoned.

two in such a way that *ahimsā* becomes almost the only means to reach Truth. Thus in a letter from prison to Narandas Gandhi around July 31, 1930, he observes:

*Without ahimsā it is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsā and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say which is the obverse and which is the reverse? Nevertheless, ahimsā is the means and Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach and so ahimsā becomes our supreme duty and Truth becomes God for us.*³⁴⁸

Two weeks later, writing to the same person, he seems to clarify what he had said earlier. All the other means are subsumed under *ahimsā* which leads to Truth. He gives the following diagram and explanation to be read at the āśram Tuesday prayer:



*Ahimsā may be deduced from Truth, or may be paired with Truth. Truth and ahimsā are one and the same thing. I am partial to Truth, however. In the final analysis there can be a single reality. The highest Truth stands by itself. Truth is the end, ahimsā is the means thereto. We know what ahimsā or non-violence is, although we find it difficult to follow the law of love. But as for Truth, we know only a fraction of it. Perfect knowledge of Truth is difficult of attainment for man even like the perfect practice of non-violence.*³⁴⁹

Notice here the distinction he makes: we know *ahimsā* but cannot practise it perfectly, we do not know Truth fully. It seems also to be according to a proportion. The proportion is: the measure in which we practise *ahimsā* is the measure in which we attain Truth.³⁵⁰ But then, some learned Hindus objected that Truth and non-violence (*satya* and *ahimsā*) are both subtle and

³⁴⁸ CW XLIV (1930) no. 87, p. 59.

³⁴⁹ Letter, August 19, 1930, in CW XLIV (1930) no. 131, p. 89-90.

³⁵⁰ Letter to Carl Heath on January 3, 1935, in CW LX (1934-1935) no. 59, p. 50-51.

abstract. Hence they cannot be apprehended in any systematic or organized manner. Gandhi would not agree to this. He would say with self-confidence:

*If there is anything special about me, it is only this, that I am organizing truth and non-violence. Otherwise they will cease to be the eternal verities that they are to me. To me truth and non-violence are not unreal things and if they cannot become our collective **dharma** they are false. What I want to do and die after doing is to organize non-violence. And if it is not valid in every field it is false.*³⁵¹

However, what he had said earlier in 1930 about our knowing *ahimsā* and not being able to practise it fully,³⁵² he seems to change in 1940 to say that we do not know *ahimsā* fully, perhaps World War II made him realize this: "*Ahimsā* in theory no one knows. It is as indefinable as God. But in its working we get glimpses of it as we have glimpses of the Almighty in His working amongst and through us".³⁵³ But, even prior to World War II, he had been humble enough to acknowledge that his is not the last word on *ahimsā*. Thus in an interview to Professor Mays, around January 10, 1937, he warns:

*I must warn you against carrying the impression with you that mine is the final word on non-violence. I know my limitations. I am but a humble seeker after truth. All I claim is that every experiment of mine has deepened my faith in non-violence as the greatest force at the disposal of mankind.*³⁵⁴

He had been invited many times to visit Europe and the USA to propound his doctrine of non-violence but he declared as early as 1928:

*I feel that I have as yet no message to deliver personally to the West. I believe my message to be universal but as yet feel that I can best deliver it through my work in my own country. If I can show visible success in India, the delivery of the message becomes complete.*³⁵⁵

Sixteen years later (1934), he was still not certain if he had succeeded in converting the people of India to his idea of non-violence and its efficacy. He had tried under different circumstances with mixed success. Yet his belief

³⁵¹ Speech at the Gandhi Seva Sangh meeting, on April 20, 1937, in CW LXV (1937) no. 114, p. 125.

³⁵² Cf. above, p. 194 footnote 349.

³⁵³ **Harijan**, March 2, 1940, in CW LXXI (1939-1940) no. 289, p. 294.

³⁵⁴ CW LXIV (1936-1937) no. 249, p. 225.

³⁵⁵ **Young India**, April 26, 1928, in CW XXXVI (1928) no. 319, p. 267.

in non-violence was firm and he says that if at any time it fails in India, the blame should be his and not of non-violence: "If violence breaks out after my death, you may conclude that my *ahimsā* was very imperfect or was not real at all—but not that the principle of *ahimsā* was wrong".³⁵⁶

At the end of this section³⁵⁷ we could summarize what we have been considering. At this stage he continued to clarify further his concepts of *satyāgraha* and *ahimsā*. He was faced with much misunderstanding about *satyāgraha* which like a heady wine was affecting many impetuous persons to try out what they considered to be a *satyāgraha* on their own. Thus Gandhi had to explain what it meant, very specially how it is a weapon that is used after all other means were exhausted and he had to further explain how it has to be used, namely, with love and with a readiness at every stage for a dialogue with the one against whom it is employed. He had also to explain the implications of Civil Disobedience as a branch of *satyāgraha* and the way in which it has to be entered into. Similarly he had to clarify what are the various circumstances and the necessary attitudes with which alone one could undertake a fast in *satyāgraha*. Above all, he placed a great emphasis at this stage on the preparation needed before launching any *satyāgraha*. His constructive programmes were a part of this preparation but he also paid attention to the individual *satyāgrahi's* preparation. Towards 1939, he began to insist that a *satyāgrahi* must be one who has faith and trust in God; he must be one who believes in non-violence as a creed and not merely a policy; he must be truthful, obedient, humble, simple and determined. Thus his demands increased. *Ahimsā* was also a concept that needed to be explained further. He had called it earlier as love, soul-force and innocence. Now he further called it as benevolence and recognized its connection with compassion. He had to clarify the various implications of *ahimsā* in daily life, its imperceptible efficacy and its idealism. He went on to insist on its being possible for man to practise it. It is a gift of God to man. It is the only means to reach out to Truth and as a means it must be accessible to all. In the beginning he expected *ahimsā* in thought, word and deed both from the

³⁵⁶ Letter to a former *āśramite*, December 4, 1934, in *CW* LIX (1934) no. 493, p. 420.

³⁵⁷ Note that I have not taken up the consideration of *swadēshi* as an allied concept, as I did at the previous chapter. Here I have mentioned it along with section IV.B. The notion and practice of *swadēshi* was the same as at the previous stage, except that it expanded at this stage to include the rejuvenation of dying or dead village industries and an emphasis on the villages becoming self-sufficient units (cf. above, ch. III, p. 158-159).

volunteers and the masses. It was only later he realized how it was difficult to expect *ahimsā* in thought from the masses. So he asked them to follow it at least in words and deeds. This he felt was imperfect but the minimum needed if he were to launch his final campaign. The practical application of *ahimsā* to situations seemed to vary from circumstance to circumstance. He clung to the doctrine of *ahimsā* in spite of many a suggestion that he give it up or modify it radically, especially in the context of World War-II and the presence of the Japanese on the door-steps of India.

VI. A dialectical tension between love of God and love for fellowmen at this stage?

So far in this chapter we have discussed Gandhi's search for Truth, the search for Truth-God which he had located in the oneness of all beings and especially in his service of fellow human beings, paying attention to their fundamental human dignity. This service had taken up various shapes in his active life. It was expressed in a life of prayer coupled with a dedicated humble service to the lowly, the poor and the distressed of his country. He did his best to see them through the various problems that they faced, not the least being, the foreign domination. The weapon he suggested for their freedom (not only the political but also the social) was *satyāgraha* in a spirit of *ahimsā*. In this final section of this chapter, we raise the question whether, at this stage, he experienced any tension between his love for God and love for man.

In fact, this question was explicitly put to him during his visit to Lausanne, and he answered it in the course of his speech on December 8, 1931:

*This is a question which begs itself. Love for God is not to be distinct from love for man. But if there was a conflict between the two loves, I would know there was a conflict in the man himself. I should therefore invite him to carry on the search within himself. But when you find love for man divorced from love for God, you will find at basis a base motive. Real love for man I regard to be utterly impossible without love for God.*³⁵⁸

This explicit and clear statement needs to be further clarified from his approach to different situations. Even love for individual persons need not be

³⁵⁸ CW XLVIII (1931-1932) no. 260, p. 411-412 (emphases are mine).

an obstacle. Consequently replying to a query from an *āśramite* on May 19, 1932, he notes:

*Love for individual persons is not wholly forbidden. Only such love should not be an obstacle to love for all beings and for God. My love for Ba [pet name of his wife] today flows from my love for God. When I was filled with lust it was an obstacle to love of God and was, therefore, unworthy.*³⁵⁹

Even the love of oneself need not be a disordered love. It has to be seen in the whole perspective of love for God and love for all creatures, thus the self itself is included within one love. Thus in an interview to a Polish engineer, Maurice Frydman around August 25, 1936 he responds to the question as to why he had chosen to shut himself up in such a remote village as Seva-gram:

*I am here to serve no one else but myself, to find my own self-realization through the service of these village folk. Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and to be one with it. This can only be done by service to all ... I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.*³⁶⁰

In this passage it is again very clear as to which he gives the prime place in his search: it is a search for God and the bold conviction that He can be discovered only in the suffering humanity and that this would lead him to the fulfilment of his own life, and would consequently enable him to reach *mōkṣa* (bliss, heaven). He gives this programme to all those who wanted to imitate him as voluntary workers. His advice to all, irrespective of their religious affiliation, was the same with slight adaptations. This service done to the lowly and poor will be done better and with great diligence, he realized, if it were done as a service done in the name of God. Thus speaking around October 22, 1938 at Kohat to *Khudai Khidmatgars* (Servants of God), a name given to the band of volunteers from among the Pathans, a war-like Muslim tribe in the North Western Frontier Province (today part of Pak-

³⁵⁹ CW XLIX (1932) no. 552, p. 456 (parentheses are mine).

³⁶⁰ CW LXIII (1936) no. 297, p. 240 (emphases are mine).

istan), and of whom Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, alias Frontier Gandhi, was the acclaimed leader, he emphasizes:

*We shall then serve God by serving our village. To relieve the distress of the unemployed by providing them work, to tend the sick, to wean people from their insanitary habits, to educate them in cleanliness and healthy living should be the job of a **Khudai Khidmatgar**. And since whatever he does is in God's service, his service will be performed with far more diligence and care than that of paid workers.*³⁶¹

Notice here the adaptation to the Muslim audience —it is not blandly said “service done to God” but rather “God's service” to possibly mean “in the name of God”. And speaking to a Christian audience he would speak of the kingdom of God. Thus in reply to the welcome address at a Christian Girls' School, whose representative had assured Gandhi that the Christian community was one with him in all his activities, he says:

*My experience tells me that the kingdom of God is within us, and that we can realize it not by saying “Lord, Lord”, but by doing His Will and His work. If therefore we wait for the kingdom to come as something coming from outside, we shall be sadly mistaken ... If we would listen to the voice of God, I assure you we would hear Him say that we are taking His name in vain if we do not think of the poor and help them ... If you cannot render the little help that they need, it is of no use talking of service of God and service of the poor ... try to identify yourself with the poor by actually helping them.*³⁶²

Notice again the difference: it is not merely a service done for God or in the name of God, but rather a service of God and of the poor.

As at the previous stage, here too, he stresses the importance of both prayer and corresponding work —action coupled with contemplation and not merely prayer or contemplation as alternatives. Thus, he would say that a mere recitation of *Gāyatri mantra* (prayer of the higher caste orthodox Hindus recited daily in the morning at sunrise and also in the evening at sunset) and the *namāz* (the daily Muslim prayer) is of no use without concern for the poor: “The Hindu who recites his *Gāyatri* regularly and the Mussalman who says his *namāz* five times a day are doing so in vain, if they have no corner in their hearts for the poor of the land”.³⁶³ Once it was

³⁶¹ CW LXVIII (1938-1939) no. 47, p. 43.

³⁶² Speech on March 25, 1927, *Young India*, March 31, 1927, in CW XXXIII (1927) no. 192, p. 192-193, .

³⁶³ *Young India*, March 10, 1927, in CW XXXIII (1928) no. 116, p. 114.

reported to him that a certain youth had decided to take *dīkṣa*, i.e. initiation through a religious ceremony into the ascetical life with the consequence of giving up one's family, all activities and retiring to secluded parts to pray and contemplate. He had a sixteen-year-old wife and a sixty-year-old mother as dependants. Gandhi reacted to this news by telling him that true ascetical life is to enter with self-dedication into a life of selfless service:

I hope that no one will give dīkṣa to this young man, and also that he himself will realize his duty ... when people take dīkṣa in these days, we see nothing but cowardice in their action, and this is why even sādhus [pious mendicants], instead of being men of light and power, are a majority of them weak and ignorant like us ... to live with one's family in poverty and meet its needs contentedly and preserving one's purity, following truth, looking upon all women other than one's wife as either a mother or a sister, to be moderate even in enjoying conjugal pleasure, to study scriptures and other holy books and to serve the country to the best of one's ability —this is dīkṣa of no mean order. Dīkṣa means self-dedication.³⁶⁴

To a lady who was discouraged and who wanted to retire from all public service, he writes:

True retirement is not a physical state, it comes from within. We have to find retirement in the midst of ceaseless work. And are not the minds of those who are living in caves, oftener than not ceaselessly at work?³⁶⁵

Similarly, to another public worker who thought of *saṁnyāsa* or life of one who renounces the world:

Saṁnyāsa does not mean the renunciation of all activities; it means only renunciation of activities prompted by desire and the fruits of action performed as duty. This is real freedom from activity. That is why one must learn to see inactivity in activity and activity in inactivity.³⁶⁶

Obviously, Gandhi has borrowed this idea from the *Gītā* which was very dear to him. It is here that the problem of action is solved. Action meant *karma* with the necessary consequence of birth and rebirth, whereas inaction is not possible and sometimes action becomes necessary as one's duty (*dharma*). The *Gītā* advocates *niṣkāmakarma* or deeds done without any attachment to fruits thereof, purely out of a sense of performing one's duty (cf. *Gītā* 4:14-20; 3:25-26). A certain Dilip Kumar Roy of Sri. Aurobindo *āśram*,

³⁶⁴ Navajivan, August 28, 1927, in CW XXXIV (1927) no. 375, p. 407-408 (parenthesis is mine).

³⁶⁵ Letter to Urmila Devi on October 22, 1932 (from prison), in CW LI (1932) no. 466, p. 275.

³⁶⁶ Letter to Narayan M. Khare on March 12, 1932, in CW XLIX (1932) no. 225.

Pondicherry, was urging Gandhi to give up all his political activities and take up *saṁnyāsa* at the Aurobindo āśram (Sri Aurobindo had himself been once (in 1905) a violent revolutionary in Bengal and seeing its futility had retired to Pondicherry to live as a recluse). But Gandhi would have none of it:

Saṁnyāsa is not cessation of all activity, mental or physical that is selfish. If I could be convinced that cessation is the better way for me, I should adopt it at once.³⁶⁷

For himself, Gandhi only desired to die with the *charkhā* (spinning wheel), the symbol of all his activities, in his hands:

People may say I am mad in saying that I wish to die with the *charkhā* in my hand. I wish not to die holding a string of beads. For concentration the *charkhā* is my beads. God appears to me in thousand forms. Sometimes I see him in the *charkhā*, sometimes in Hindu-Muslim unity, sometimes in the eradication of untouchability. I move as my feelings draw me.³⁶⁸

There is also the curious case of one J.P. Bhansali, a very learned man who had renounced everything and had been roaming around half-naked, bare-footed and eating only bitter herbs and uncooked flour. At one time he had even stitched up his lips to keep silent and had survived on wheat porridge sucked through a straw. After much wandering on foot, he had finally reached Gandhi around April 1935, and broke his silence. The reported conversations between the two are very interesting.³⁶⁹ In the end Gandhi persuaded him that work and service are necessary: "Meditation and worship are not exclusive things like jewels to be kept locked up in a strong box. They must be seen in every act of ours".³⁷⁰ And he continues further on: "To do no work is no renunciation. It is inertia".³⁷¹ For Gandhi, all actions, however small or insignificant, when it is done for others, are done for the love of God and hence he wished that they be done well: "Everything including sanitary service must be done intelligently, enthusiastically and for the love of God".³⁷²

³⁶⁷ Letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, July 16, 1934, in *CW* LVIII (1934) no. 217, p. 195.

³⁶⁸ Speech at Gandhi Seva Sangh on April 20, 1937, in *CW* LXV (1937) no. 114, p. 133-134.

³⁶⁹ Cf. *CW* LX (1934-1935) no. 558, p. 401-403; no. 613, p. 436-439; *CW* LXI (1935) no. 7, p. 5-6 including the footnote no. 1 therein.

³⁷⁰ *CW* XL (1934-1935) no. 613, p. 437.

³⁷¹ *CW* XL (1934-1935) no. 613, p. 438-439.

³⁷² *CW* L (1932) no. 206, p. 216; this can be better understood when one realizes that in India those who do sanitary work are, unfortunately, held in low repute.

Worldly affairs can be good or bad according to our own level of attachment. One could see God through them. Thus counselling someone, he says:

*These worldly affairs are not a thing to be looked upon with contempt. It is only through worldly affairs that a vision of the Lord is possible. Those worldly affairs that create infatuation deserve to be looked upon with contempt and always shunned. This is my firm opinion and experience.*³⁷³

This is in line with what we said above, namely, action without attachment. Similarly, counselling a lady who had complained that her life is one mad rush and she had no time for prayer or meditation:

*... if you would but labour for the sake of God, then no work becomes a rush. We simply give then the best of what is in us. Then there is no feeling of utter exhaustion, and when the whole life becomes a dedication, it becomes a perpetual prayer and meditation. For meditation you do not need a special time. Meditation to be true should be interwoven with every activity of ours.*³⁷⁴

Here one must pay attention to the word 'interwoven'; hence it is not exclusively work but meditation at the same time when the work on hand is done meditatively. This was why Gandhi had been constantly reminding the āśramites to work silently. A certain Professor W. Lutostawski had read in an article that Gandhi had said that good actions were useless and that he was spending his time in contemplation. Shocked, the Professor wrote asking Gandhi about the true position. Gandhi notes in his reply on January 25, 1929: "... nor do I pass my time in contemplation as distinguished from active work. You have rightly guessed that my active work is my contemplation".³⁷⁵ We could add here a little note about community prayer. For Gandhi, community prayer meant a means to make us realize our common, human solidarity. It has to help us to become more concerned about others and be service-minded. Consequently, even such prayers would have to be suspended when our neighbour is in need. Writing to āśram women on September 23, 1929, he notes:

We come together for prayer in order that we may be fit for physical service to others. When, however, one is required to do a physical duty, the doing of that duty becomes a prayer. If any woman absorbed in meditation hears someone stung by a scorpion, she is bound to get up from her medi-

³⁷³ Letter to Hanumanprasad Poddar on July 21, 1932, in CW L (1932) no. 245, p. 271 (emphases are mine).

³⁷⁴ Letter to Gertrude S. Keller-Ching on March 31, 1933, in CW LIV (1933) no. 287, p. 256 (emphasis is mine).

³⁷⁵ CW XXXVIII (1928-1929) no. 478, p. 400.

*tation and run to the help of that person. Meditation finds its fulfilment in the service of the distressed.*³⁷⁶

However, there are times when prayer becomes the only action possible and it is not without its effect. Thus, in the aftermath of the Quetta earthquake of May 1935, when the British India Government refused to allow the Congress relief workers to enter the area, he asked the rest of the country to pray and engage itself in self-introspective self-purification. In a discussion with a visitor from Quetta around June 22, 1935 when he was asked "... is not prayer by itself ineffective without acts of service?", Gandhi in the course of his reply remarks: "If we are engaged in service all our waking hours, I should have to say nothing. But we are not so engaged. And when we are not so engaged, God's name, taken with a view to self-purification, is not taken in vain".³⁷⁷ He also realized that too much work could also do harm. Thus writing on February 2, 1927 to āśram women he asks: "The effects of regular work is that of regular food. It nourished the soul. But, even as over-eating spoils one's health, so excessive work at times wears out one's spirit".³⁷⁸ About that time, he too had been over-working. He was ill with blood pressure and makes an interesting interpretation about the situation in a letter to his friend H. Kallenbach who was in South Africa. Gandhi pictures as if God were telling him:

*"You fool, you thought that you would work wonders. Have your lesson now and learn whilst there is yet time that God alone is to wonder-work and He uses whom He pleases as His instrument". I am now taking the chastisement. I hope in due humility and if He raises me from this sick-bed, I am making Him promises that I shall reform my ways and shall seek still more strenuously to know His Will and do it.*³⁷⁹

As at the previous stage, here too, we can notice his stress on a wholistic view of life with his diverse activities. It is surprising at times to note how his insistence at one time is on this one or that, and at other times on something else; and each time he is able to speak and act as if that were the only thing, in such a way that some were truly confused. Thus in the beginning it was the spinning-wheel and Hindu-Muslim unity; then it was all about untouchability and temple entry; then it was only village industries that mattered; and the list is not complete without mentioning his interest in the

³⁷⁶ CW XLI (1929) no. 406, p. 455 (emphases are mine).

³⁷⁷ Harijan, June 22, 1935, in CW LXI (1935) no. 268, p. 186.

³⁷⁸ CW XXXIII (1927) no. 108, p. 107; also cf. no. 102, p. 102.

³⁷⁹ Letter on May 13, 1927, in CW XXXIII (1927) no. 324, p. 314-315.

development of a national language and the 'Basic Education'. Added to all these were politics and the fight against social evils such as drink-habit, dowry system, temple prostitution, and child marriage. He says in answer to an objection that he was often diverting the attention of the people from the one political issue of independence to other non-political issues: "... I draw no hard and fast line on demarcation between political, social, religious and other questions. I have always held that they are inter-dependent and that the solution of one brings nearer the solution of the rest".³⁸⁰ Speaking at the Madras Young Men Christian Association on September 4, 1927, he makes a statement which may surprise us but that is how Gandhi viewed his whole life. He has been asked to give there a religious discourse and he remarks:

*I do not know that I have ever given a religious discourse, or to put it the other way, I do not know a single speech of mine or talk of mine, within my own recollection, which has not been a religious discourse. I think, if I am not deceived, that at the back of every word that I have uttered since I have known what public life is, and of every act that I have done, there has been a religious consciousness and a downright religious motive. My acts may have appeared to my audiences, or to the readers of the words that I have written, political, economic and many other things. But I ask you to accept my word that the motive behind every one of them has been essentially and predominantly religious.*³⁸¹

We can notice here how he had succeeded in leading a rich and meaningful life, wherein there were no divisions and dichotomies. Now we can understand how love for God and love for man are not two contradictory realities or two divergent moments or phases or spheres but it is just one integral whole.

We may finally ask, as an aside, 'was there any hidden or unconscious Indian philosophical viewpoint beneath all that he said and did'? Replying to some philosophico-religious questions from a correspondent, to the question about which philosophical path is acceptable, he remarks quite candidly:

*I have somehow found something for myself by combining all the suggestions made by the authors of *śāstras*. It is, therefore, quite difficult for me to say which path is acceptable. *Śaṅkarā* is dear to me, and so are *Rāmānuja*, *Madhva*, *Vallabha* and others—I have relished delicacies from*

³⁸⁰ **Bombay Chronicles**, November 17, 1932, in **CW LII** (1932-1933) no. 1, p. 4; cf. **CW LII** (1932-1933) no. 47, p. 37 where he says: "I don't regard my life as divisible into so many water-tight compartments"; cf. also **CW LVII** (1934) no. 205, p. 199; **CW LVIII** (1934) no. 192, p. 172; **CW XXXVI** (1928) no. 516, p. 449; **CW XLVIII** (1931-1932) no. 33, p. 50, where he notes: "A man who is trying to discover and follow the Will of God cannot possibly leave a single field of life untouched"; cf. also **CW LXVIII** (1938-1939) no. 237, p. 201.

³⁸¹ **Young India**, September 15, 1927, in **CW XXXIV** (1927) no. 407, p. 450 sq.

all, but have not been able to satisfy my hunger through what I got from any of them.³⁸²

Note that these authors were contemporaneous respectively with Western philosophers Scotus Eriugena, Abelard, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. Their philosophies are also divergent. Thus *Śaṅkarā* may be broadly described as holding on to non-dualism; *Rāmānuja* to dualism; *Madhva* to unique non-dualism and *Vallabha* to unique dualism.³⁸³ Was he then *anēkāntavādin* (one who maintains non-unitary nature of reality) as he used to call himself sometimes?³⁸⁴ Perhaps he only implied by that, that he was pluralistic (*anēka*) or eclectic in his vision. What we can definitely say is: here was a man who was 'open to all ideas, one who sought Truth wherever 'It' may be, and howsoever 'It' may be; he was above all a practical man with a very practical vision of life, permeated by one quality above all—*ahimsā*, non-violence which is, in his way of looking, active love and is positive though expressed through a negative term because of its indefinability. Love for God and love for man cannot be in opposition because they are one whole and as love is indefinable and yet rich, they cannot but be inclusive. One goes forward keeping the integral whole in one's various activities and all the activities are to be done in selfless love, i.e. without attachment to the fruit thereof. Thus again we are back in love or *ahimsā* and are being constantly led to Truth (*Satya*).

Now at the conclusion of this chapter, we bring together the various salient points. As in the previous two stages we have considered, during this also, he was filled with a great undying enthusiasm to discover Truth in all its fullness. But he realized ever more clearly that what he found was only partial truths. Nevertheless, he was not disappointed. He accepted that itself as a truth (*satya*), understanding by that the relativity of 'truths' as appre-

³⁸² Letter to Santoji Maharaj, on July 2, 1927, in CW XXXIV (1927) no. 89, p. 93, .

³⁸³ It is only a very broad classification. We cannot go into the intricacies of the various systems here. Their comparison here with the Western authors is merely to point out to the time sequence.

³⁸⁴ Cf. CW XXIX (1925-1926) no. 142, p. 411, where he says in reply to a question: "I am an *advaitist* and yet I can support *dvaitism*. The world is changing every moment, and is therefore unreal, it has no permanent existence. But though it is constantly changing, it has something about it which persists and it is therefore to that extent real. I therefore have no objection to calling it real and unreal, and thus being called an *anēkāntavādi* or a *syādvādi*. But my *syādvāda* is not the *syādvāda* of the learned, it is peculiarly my own. I cannot engage in debate with them ... I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality ... Formerly, I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I can love them ... I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love. My *anēkāntavāda* is the result of the twin doctrine of *satya* and *ahimsā*".

hended by different individuals. This led him all the more to be broad-minded in his approach to the adherents of different religions, including his own, all of whom claimed to possess truth. He would only tell them to be tolerant of one another since none of them possessed the whole Truth, which is obviously beyond everything, is mysterious, indefinable and inexhaustible. Through the apprehension of partial truths, one is in the process of coming ever closer to the Absolute Truth which, of course, cannot be reached in this life; for, the moment we reach 'It', it will be bliss eternal (*mōkṣa*). Meanwhile, Gandhi prosecutes his 'experiments with truth' ever more enthusiastically and ever ready to correct the mistakes he may make, thus keeping his goal steady.

His concept of God at this time, continued for the most part, as at the previous state, but an intuition that presented itself during the end of the previous stage became firm during this and ever after he stressed it: 'Truth is God'. He preferred this to the previous: 'God is Truth' because he found that Truth is not only an attribute of God but expressive of his very Reality (nature?). He found it to be more radical than even 'God is Love'. Truth is *Sat* or Reality or all that 'IS'. It is so basic that not even an atheist could deny it because denying it he would be implicitly accepting it since his very argument would show that he is pursuing Truth unconsciously. God's Providence rules the world, His Will prevails; He is the mysterious Power that pervades everything. The wisdom of man consists in listening to God's voice, deep down in his own conscience. It is important to practise *yamanyamas* (rules of self-restraint and spiritual progress) in order to be able to hear this 'still small voice'. In the previous stage too, he had spoken of this; but during this stage he heard this voice more often, thus he claimed that his many fasts were due to the command of this voice within. We can also piece together, from his many writings and sayings, the process of his coming to any decision or truth-apprehension. It was to marshal all details before the court of conscience or the 'voice' (which could be at times very strong and vivid) and then to use the faculty of reasoning to discover the needed justifying argument for the course of action decided on.

He describes God in other ways also: God is Life, Light, Nature, Soul. But essentially He is beyond description. As at the previous stage, here too, he would speak of the inadequacy of all terms to describe God, the Indescribable. Nevertheless, he would accept all partial or concrete ways of speaking about God since that is how, we, as corporeal beings, can manage to speak and be related to God on our part. This was how he was open to all religions and defended the validity of each person to hold on to his own favourite expression for God. Thus for him, it was *Rāma* and this name

evoked in him emotions which the expression 'God' could not evoke. God is to be perceived as the First Cause who rules the world and He could be discovered even in tiny creatures. God could also be perceived in various events, both in nature and in one's own life.

Gandhi located his search for Truth-God in a service to fellowmen. The basis for such a service is the acceptance of the oneness of all beings great and small. As previously, here too, he stresses the way in which our actions good or bad affect others. We are all one in solidarity. Hence there is a need to lead lives according to Truth and eschew all falsehood. During this stage, he began to stress the interdependence of all human beings on one another. Hence the need for cooperation with all that is good and truthful but at the same time one has to non-cooperate with evil. Evil disappears for the want of cooperation. Working along his idea of oneness of all human beings and their interdependence and needed cooperation, he is able to show ways in which the caste system could be transformed to its pristine purity of a horizontal ordering of society rather than a vertical one of high and low. All are equal as human beings. Thus he would work for an end to the inhuman way in which some human beings were classified as untouchables and basic amenities denied them. He would work strenuously for the temples to be thrown open to the untouchables whom he now called *Harijans* (people of God). He would thus rouse in them an appreciation for their own self-respect and a consequent need for self-reformation to live as respected members of society with human dignity. However, they would have to give up the drink evil, eating of carrion and beef, be educated and observe rules of hygiene. He would also continue, as in the previous stage, to stress our solidarity with the poor. It was for him the thread that united the rich and the poor, the educated and uneducated, the city-dweller and the villager.

If human solidarity and dignity made him locate his search for Truth in society itself, the means he employed to express this search was varied. A life of prayer was important for him. But, as in the previous stage, it was not to be an empty prayer, a mere recitation of words. He stressed prayer not only as individuals but also as a community, since that expresses well our social dimension and responsibility for one another. Thus prayer leads to social action and discovery of Truth-God therein. This led him to fight against social evils of every type as being against Truth. They were all falsehoods. Consequently, he would work against drink evil, untouchability, child-marriage, prostitution, illiteracy and unjust wages. He would uphold Truth by upholding the position of women, widow remarriage, basic education, revival of village industries, Hindu-Muslim unity, encouragement of local languages and spread of a national language. Part of these concerns

was his involvement in national politics with a view to independence. But he considered this independence not in any narrow sense of driving away the English, but rather in a wholistic way —an independence from all social evil and on the road to a wholesale progress. Hence he stressed ever expanding constructive programmes before independence is achieved. These ought not to be delayed because an independence, without these being worked out to some extent, would mean confusion. He wanted to shake the people out of their lethargy and make them active. Again all these were a part of Truth and hence part of his Truth-God.

The weapon that he wanted to use in this his broad based struggle was *satyāgraha*, used in a spirit of *ahimsā*. At this stage, *satyāgraha* was being misused and he had to clarify that it was to be used only after other remedies have been tried and definitely after a thorough preparation. This preparation was essentially self-purification and a commitment to constructive programmes which would show the level of determination in a *satyāgrahi* to suffer and if necessary to die for *satya* or Truth. He had also to clarify further, during this stage his notion of *ahimsā*. He found more and more that it was subtle and its application varied from situation to situation. Above all it was put to severe test during World War II. Against odds, he upheld the principle of *ahimsā* and guided the erring Congress on the path of *ahimsā*. At the same time, his whole project of non-violence as the supreme principle that pervades our lives, is a grand experiment. He was conscious that if it were proved efficacious in India, then it would be a service he renders to the whole world which may perhaps follow suit. Again and again he had to stress, as during the previous stage, that *ahimsā* is not *ahimsā* of the weak but of the strong. One gives up even the wish to hurt others, not because he is not capable of hurting but, because he loves. Thus *ahimsā* was for him positive love. This *ahimsā*, since it is a means, and as he began to believe, the only means, it should be available to all and within their capacity. Thus, non-violence is a gift of God to man and hence becomes natural to him. However, towards the end (1942), he did not demand from the masses non-violence in thought but he expected at least the minimum: non-violence in words and deeds. This minimum was necessary if success was to follow in the struggle that he was planning.

His whole project of searching for Truth-God, is to be achieved through *ahimsā*, the most universal love. There is no division or distinction in one's love for God and love for fellowmen. It was for him just one movement of *ahimsā*, rich in all details. Ultimately, it would include everything, living and non-living since it embraces the whole of *Sat* or Reality or Truth. Life for him was not to be water-tight compartments but one whole, inclusive of everything.

Chapter IV

The final stage:

From silence to eloquent silence 1942-1948

In this chapter we deal with the last five years and a half that remained of Gandhi's mortal life. There was not much of a change in his views but rather a severe testing of his basic principles in the context of an emerging independent India. Events moved rapidly in the last two years of his life and his response remained steady and in keeping with his whole life. We shall pass over this chapter quickly, paying attention mainly to the clarification of his thoughts, brought about by the events around him.

I. The historical background and biographical notes

As a result of the AICC (All India Congress Committee) resolution of August 8, 1942 to launch the Quit India Movement (i.e. to demand that, in the context of World War II, Britain quit India and leave it to its own fate), he found himself in prison for the last time. Along with his wife and secretary Mahadev Desai he was lodged in the relative comfort of Aga Khan's palace at Pune. Soon tragedy struck: six days after the imprisonment, Mahadev Desai, his devoted secretary, died suddenly. The imprisonment of Gandhi and other Congress leaders led to a wave of protests, violent demonstrations and acts of sabotage in India. The British put down the unrest ruthlessly, imprisoning hundreds and destroying even the innocent spinning programmes Gandhi had set up in the villages. He corresponded with the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow and tried to impress on him that he should have waited and seen how Gandhi would have conducted the Quit India Movement non-violently, whereas the hasty action of the Viceroy had provoked violence in the country. The Viceroy refused to acknowledge the mistake and blamed Gandhi.¹ Saddened by the growing violence in the country and seeking God's Will, Gandhi began his 21 days' purificatory fast on February 10, 1943. With great difficulty he was able to complete this dangerous fast. Meanwhile, around this time (February 8, 1943), a nationalist

¹ Cf. CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 2, p. 50-51; no. 3, p. 53; "... the Government goaded the people to the point of madness" (no. 5, p. 56).

leader of Bengal, Subhas Chandra Bose who had earlier escaped to Germany, left for Japan by a German U-boat. Soon he (Bose) was to organize the Indian National Army (INA) from among the Indian POWs and volunteers, with a view to freeing India from the British by force of arms. Though initially successful, it proved to be a brief, chimerical experiment in the method of violence. With the defeat of Japan, it ended and Subhas Chandra Bose is supposed to have told his followers that since he had failed, they should return and follow Gandhi's lead.

Gandhi's cup of sorrows was not over. On February 22, 1944, his wife Kasturba died and Gandhi complained to the new Viceroy Lord Wavell that the Government had delayed proper medical aid. In March, he asked to be transferred to an ordinary prison. In a letter to Lord Wavell on April 4, 1944, he used an interesting imagery: "As I visualize India today, it is one vast prison containing one hundred million souls. You are its sole custodian. The Government prisons are prisons within this prison".² However, on May 6, 1944, the Government released him. He spent a fortnight in silence to discover what his next move should be since he felt that the situation had changed during the last two years he had spent in prison. Increasingly he began to face failures, e.g. in July he tried to interest the Viceroy by offering concrete suggestions but they were turned down; in September he had a series of talks with the Muslim leader M. Jinnah, which failed. So Gandhi turned once again to his constructive activities in the villages, trying to revive the various items of his village industries, not merely the *khādi* work: "I have now given up the idea that the villagers can earn their living through doing *khādi* work alone ... village uplift is possible only when we rejuvenate village life as a whole, revive all village industries and make the entire village industrious".³ During this time, the Socialists and Communists asked him quite a number of questions regarding the peasants, their right to land,

² CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 85, p. 259. He had also written to R. Tottenham, the Additional Secretary, Government of India, after reading a report that Rupees 500 P.M. was spent on him and his companions and he felt that it would be much more if the rental of the Aga Khan palace, expenses on the guards, convict workers and others were all put together. So he asked to be transferred to an ordinary prison and concluded his letter: "In conclusion, I cannot conceal from myself the sad thought that the whole expense of this comes from taxes collected from the dumb millions of India" [CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 76, p. 241].

³ Discussion with Sri Krisnadas Jaju on October 12, 1944, in CW LXXVIII (1944) no. 225, p. 187.

zamīndāri (land-lord) system and the labourers' rights. Gandhi replied to these questions in the light of his strategy of *satyāgraha* and non-violence. His many activities once again forced him to take rest and he undertook what he called a 'fast from work' from December 4 to 31, 1944.

As it so often happened, a period of silence and rest only provoked him to thought and in January 1945 he started his questionable *brahma-cārya* experiment to test the level of his non-violence but gave it up very soon.⁴ From June 24 to July 16, 1945 we see him at Simla, to be on hand, to assist the all parties meeting convened by the Viceroy. Surprisingly, he made no comments when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. However, his comments on war criminals and their trial, were incisive. Thus in an interview to Ralph Conistan of **Colliers Weekly**, he remarked around April 25, 1945:

What is a war criminal? Was not war itself a crime against God and humanity and, therefore, were not all those who sanctioned, engineered and conducted wars, war criminals? War criminals are not confined to the Axis Power alone. Roosevelt and Churchill are no less war criminals than Hitler and Mussolini. Hitler was "Great Britain's sin". Hitler is only an answer to British imperialism, and this I say in spite of the fact that I hate Hitlerism and its anti-Semitism. England, America and Russia have all of them got their hands dyed more or less red—not merely Germany and Japan. The Japanese have only proved themselves to be apt pupils of the West. They have learnt at the feet of the West and beaten it at its own game.⁵

During the last two months of 1945 and the first quarter of 1946, he travelled extensively and experienced for the first time more disciplined meetings. He discovered that people quietened down readily in the context of prayer. So he began to preface all his public meetings with a prayer service. Writing on December 28, 1945 to D.B. Kalelkar, his close associate, he notes: "I experience supreme peace here even in the midst of meetings attended by thousands. This is a new sight altogether ... Moreover, the people no longer ask for speeches from me, but want prayer meetings".⁶ Two days earlier, ad-

⁴ Cf. letter to Munnalal G. Shah, in CW LXXIX (1945) no. 259, p. 149. Of his *brahma-cārya* experiment we shall consider later in due order.

⁵ CW LXXIX (1945) no. 730, p. 422-423.

⁶ CW LXXXII (1945-1946) no. 399, p. 287. Cf. also letter to Madalasa on the same date: "How strange it is that people do not want speeches but want prayer meetings" [CW LXXXII (1945-1946) no. 416, p. 300]

dressing a mammoth crowd of more than 100,000 persons in Bengal, he had declared:

*I have come here to know what you have done so long and also to know about your sufferings, and after that to try to help ameliorate some of them. I have not come here to deliver speeches. I have delivered many speeches in my life. Now I am old in age and there has been a change in my mind, and I think by delivering speeches I will not do any good to you.*⁷

Another feature of his closing years was a weakening of memory. He wanted people to get in writing what he says he would do for them.⁸ His interest in 'Nature Cure' reached its climax with the establishment of a nature-cure unit for the poor at a village named Uruli Kanchan, with the help of an eccentric physician Dr. Dinshaw Mehta.⁹ From 1945, he also began to speak of his hope of living up to 125 years. This was in line with the Indian idealism that one who has reached equanimity in life and is engaged in selfless service could aspire to it. Thus writing to his friend and industrialist G.D. Birla on October 26, 1945, he notes: "If I am to live for 125 years, there is also this condition that my sense of objectivity, that is, non-attachment should increase day by day and approximate as much to perfection as is humanly possible".¹⁰ But from early 1947, he began to doubt whether he would live up to be 125 since he felt that his equanimity was disturbed: "I become impatient and irritated. It is not conducive to a life of utter consecration without which a long life of 125 years is neither possible nor desirable".¹¹ During this last stage, he also insisted on speaking for the most part in Hindustani (a popular mixture of Hindi and Urdu languages) and wanted Indians to speak or write to him either in Hindustani or their own mother tongue but not in English.

⁷ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, December 27, 1945, in *CW LXXXII* (1945-1946) no. 395, p. 283-284.

⁸ Letter, November 14, 1945, in *CW LXXXII* (1945-1946) no. 119, p. 77.

⁹ *CW LXXXII* (1945-1946) no. 155, p. 101-102; *CW LXXXII* (1945-1946) no. 149, p. 93.

¹⁰ *CW LXXXI* (1945) no. 760, p. 424; cf. also *CW LXXX* (1945) no. 602, p. 360; *CW LXXXII* (1945-1946) no. 220, p. 163; *CW LXXXIII* (1946) no. 119, p. 117; *CW LXXXIII* (1946) no. 81, p. 86.

¹¹ A note to Gladys Owen on his [Gandhi's] silence day on March 24, 1947, in *CW LXXXVII* (1947) no. 146, p. 151

The year 1946 brought in its wake political turmoil. Political detainees had been released and elections for the Legislative Councils were announced. After the British Cabinet Mission's deliberations, a plan for interim government was announced on June 16, 1946. Gandhi witnessed the scandalous scramble among Congressmen for tickets. They even tried to get Gandhi to recommend them to the high-ups. Meanwhile the Muslim League which had not accepted the plan for an interim government prior to the granting of independence, launched 'Direct Action' on August 16, 1946 to press for an independent Pakistan. There were serious communal riots and hundreds were killed in Calcutta. Similarly there was an outbreak of communal violence in Bombay followed by very serious disturbances at Noakhali and Tippera in Bengal where arson, loot, rape and forcible conversions to Islam took place. Gandhi set out for Noakhali on November 6, 1946, to restore peace. Here, there were no mammoth crowds to welcome him nor big prayer meetings. He had to walk from village to village braving all odds. He divided his volunteers and made them live in different villages to instil courage in the displaced people. It was also in the midst of such loneliness and trial he resumed his questionable *brahmaçārya* experiment. We shall consider this later.

On February 20, 1947, British Labour Government of Attlee announced that, irrespective of the various parties in India coming to an agreement, Britain would leave India by June 1948. To wind up British rule, a new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, was sent. But Gandhi was busy bringing peace between Hindus and Muslims. In Bihar, the Hindus had taken revenge for the happenings in Bengal. So Gandhi moved to Bihar in March 1947. He did go to Delhi to meet the new Viceroy, give his suggestions, sign a joint appeal along with Jinnah (representing the Muslim League) for communal harmony, but he quickly returned to Bihar and succeeded in restoring communal harmony. He made the Hindus welcome back the displaced Muslims. Meanwhile, disturbances broke out in Punjab and he had to go back to Delhi to help the CWC (Congress Working Committee) in its deliberations. During this time, his prayer services in Delhi were disturbed by Hindu extremists who objected to the recitation of the Koran at the common services. After another short visit to Calcutta and Bihar, he returned to Delhi and stayed for over two months. He resolutely held on to the view that there ought not to be a partition of India and he foresaw the troubles it would bring on the nation. He recommended that Britain should shorten its stay still further and quit, leaving the Hindus and the Muslims to settle their

own problems. Though there may be chaos in the beginning, it would get itself adjusted. He considered it to be merely a family quarrel. Both the Viceroy and the Congress leaders heard Gandhi but were not convinced. Gandhi's secretary Pyarelal notes: "The impossible old man was put on the pedestal, admired for his genius and 'unerring hunch', consulted, listened to with respectful attention and by-passed".¹² The Congress, however, accepted the partition plan early in June. With this began the arrival of refugees from W. Punjab and the Hindus became dissatisfied with Gandhi's attitude of reconciliation and some of the letters he received contained titles such as 'Mohammed Gandhi', 'Jinnah's slave', and 'Communist'. All this only amused him and he is said to have quipped: "It is the people who conferred upon me the title of Mahatma, these epithets, too, are a gift from them; they are equally welcome".¹³ On July 18, 1947, the Indian Independence Bill received the royal assent after having been passed earlier in the British parliament. India became independent on August 15, 1947 and Pakistan on the day before. Meanwhile Gandhi had quit the capital and was at Calcutta trying to maintain peace.

Though Gandhi's presence initially prevented the outbreak of communal violence in Calcutta during August, news of W. Punjab horrors ignited the flames of communal passions. On September 1, 1947, Calcutta witnessed murder, arson and looting on a large scale. Gandhi undertook a fast unto death unless the situation improved for the better. The fast dramatically eased the situation and Gandhi was able to break the fast seventy-three hours after it was commenced. He then prepared to go to Punjab. On the way he stopped at Delhi but Delhi itself was in conflagration. The numerous refugees from West Pakistan were in an angry mood. The British writer Percival Griffiths describes:

Towards the end of August 1947 there began one of the greatest and most tragic mass-migrations of history. Innumerable multitudes from towns and villages alike, left their homes and all their worldly possessions, except perhaps what they could carry with them, and trekked wearily to the hoped-for safety of the West if they were Muslim, or East if they were Sikhs or Hindus. They had no plans, no ideas of how they would live and in most cases no known destination. The imagination is numbed in the attempt to conceive the suffering and the sense of helplessness of these wretched cavalcades. Nor did flight necessarily bring safety. Many

¹² PYARELAL, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. II, Ahmedabad, 1958, p. 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

*groups of refugees were attacked on the road and put to death, while refugee trains were derailed and their passengers murdered.*¹⁴

No wonder then that the refugees who reached Delhi tried to drive out the Muslims and occupy their houses. As in the succeeding months more and more refugees poured into Delhi; killing and looting became the order of the day. Gandhi undertook for the last time in his life a fast unto death on January 13, 1948. This fast caused severe damage to his kidneys and he all but died. But it solved a few vexing problems: the first was that India paid up Pakistan's share of national assets at Gandhi's instance (though the Indian Government feared that Pakistan would use the money to buy weapons to fight the undeclared war in Kashmir) and the second was the restoration of communal harmony. Gandhi broke his fast on January 18, 1948. Extremist groups were not happy about the outcome. They somehow felt that Gandhi was being partial to the Muslims. So a plot was hatched in Pune and an attempt on his life was made on January 20, 1948, but the country-made bomb only caused minor damage to the building where Gandhi was conducting the prayers and the man who was to shoot Gandhi, lost his nerve. The second attempt was successful. On Friday, January 30, 1948, as he entered the prayer ground for the evening prayer, Nathuram Godse, a Hindu extremist stepped forward as if to make obeisance and shot him dead at point-blank range. Gandhi was silenced physically but his message continues to challenge us to walk courageously on the path of non-violence (*ahimsā*) which alone could bring lasting peace to the troubled world.

II. A genuine search for God

A. A search for Truth-God

As in the previous stages, during this final stage, too, his search for God took the shape of a search for genuineness. During the previous stage, he had established that for him Truth is God. Coming out of his last prison term, he was struck by the pervading forces of injustice, exploitation and falsehood which obscure truth. Thus in a private talk on October 26, 1944, he observes:

The unbearable forces of injustice, exploitation and falsehood prevailing in this country and the world stifle me. Government subsists on falsehood, but amongst us the number of people, who subsist on this falsehood

¹⁴ GRIFFITHS, P., *Modern India*, London, 1957; 3rd rev. ed. 1962, p. 108.

*and who have made injustice and exploitation the principle of their lives, is not small. In the presence of this, good elements of life are entirely suppressed and appear helpless.*¹⁵

Whenever he was completely at loss, he broke the stalemate quite often by a recourse to fasting. Thus in a statement about a proposed fast he said on October 29, 1944:

*My heart is heavily grieved by the injustice, exploitation and falsehood prevailing and increasing, day by day, in the world. The best remedy for it is to awaken the good elements in the whole world... I desire the destruction of exploitation, injustice and falsehood. If they are destroyed my fast will be unnecessary.*¹⁶

Thus we observe that the motive of the fast is to rouse up the good elements so that truth may once again prevail, i.e. Truth-God may triumph. In a curious way, he sees that a claim for an independent Pakistan as a land only for Muslims and the dividing of the country only on the basis of religion was a falsehood since God is the same for the Muslim as well as for the Hindu, though each may call Him by a different name. Thus he was loathe to support the move for an independent Pakistan: "I have called Pakistan a sin. Can I cooperate to make sin a success? God cannot belie Himself. Truth cannot work for untruth. That all things are possible with God cannot be used to make God break his law".¹⁷

By far his search for Truth-God was, at this final stage, connected all the more with *ahimsā*, since *ahimsā* remained for him the potent means towards reaching God. Hence, in a discussion with a friend around May 28, 1946, the friend had said: "We feel that we have derived more strength from truth than from your *ahimsā*", to which Gandhi replied: "You are wrong in thinking that in my partiality for *ahimsā* I have given truth the second place. You are equally wrong in thinking that the country has derived more strength from truth than *ahimsā*. On the contrary, I am firmly convinced that whatever progress the country has made, is due to its adoption of *ahimsā* as its method of struggle". A little later, the friend shifted his position and stated: "Nevertheless, your emphasis is always on *ahimsā*. You have made the propagation of non-violence the mission of your life", to

¹⁵ A talk with Mridula Sarabhai, in *CW LXXVIII* (1944) no. 293, p. 232-233

¹⁶ *The Bombay Chronicles*, October 30, 1944, in *CW LXXVIII* (1944) no. 306, p. 244

¹⁷ *CW LXXXIV* (1946) no. 476, p. 385.

which Gandhi replied: "There again you are wrong. *Ahimsā* is not the goal. Truth is the goal", and he went on to say: "It is *ahimsā*, therefore, that our masses have to be educated in. Education in truth follows from it as a natural end".¹⁸ More about *ahimsā* at this final stage, we shall consider in section V of this chapter. Here we have only noted the place of Truth in connection with *ahimsā*.

It is, perhaps, topical here to mention his questionable *brahmaçārya* experiment at this final stage. It was part of his quest for truth. His theory was that *ahimsā* as the soul-force was potent and effective. It has to change the situation for the better. So, if no such expected change has occurred, then it is an indication that his practice of Truth and *ahimsā* was defective. To test whether his non-violence was perfect or not, he started sleeping in the same bed with naked women. If he could, in spite of that, remain chaste in thought and deed, it would be a sign that his non-violence had become perfect and this would have its beneficial repercussions on his surroundings. Some of his associates protested against this. Gandhi made no secret of his experiment and spoke of it in his prayer meetings at Noakhali. For a while, he suspended it and questioned other knowledgeable people, though he always claimed that he himself was convinced of its validity and a recommendable practice for certain individuals but not for all. He considered it as part of his contribution for the welfare of the world: "... if I can become a perfect *brahmaçāri* thereby, would I not be able to contribute more to the welfare of the world? Even if there is a single person who can train himself that way, he should do it".¹⁹ He claimed success in this, his experiment which he called a *yajña* (effective sacrifice).

¹⁸ **Harijan**, June 23, 1946, in **CW LXXXIV** (1946) no. 289, p. 228-229

¹⁹ Letter to Krishnachandra, March 7, 1945, in **CW LXXIX** (1945) no. 366, p. 222; cf. also no. 259, p. 149; no. 316, p. 192; no. 317, p. 193; no. 353, p. 212-213; no. 356, p. 215-216; no. 400, p. 238.

Other references at a later date: **CW LXXXVI** (1946-1947) no. 545, p. 414, wherein he consults one Satis Chandra Mukerji, alias Nanga Baba, a holy man. Cf. also a letter to his son in South Africa, February 1, 1947, in **CW LXXXVI** (1946-1947) no. 547, p. 415; openly he speaks of it in prayer meetings: **CW LXXXVI** (1946-1947) no. 552, p. 420; no. 558, p. 423; no. 562, p. 425 and no. 593, p. 452-453, wherein he tells Vinoba Bhave (his disciple in a way) that it is not merely an experiment but a *yajña*; **CW LXXXVI** (1946-1947) no. 606, p. 465-466.

Further references: **CW LXXXVII** (1947) no. 11, p. 13-14; no. 12, p. 14-16; interesting is the discussion on the matter with two fellow workers who were sorely disappointed with what Gandhi was doing, cf. no. 91, p. 89-92; no. 105, p. 103-104; Appendix nos. IV and V, p. 535-537. Of interest is the definition of *brahmaçārya* that he gives in a letter to

B. His concept of God at this stage

His concept of God at this final stage did not differ much from the previous stage. He applied it further to different circumstances. Hence he would consider even cleanliness as an attribute of God. Thus writing to Dinshaw K. Mehta who was running a naturopathy clinic, he notes: "... I believe that cleanliness is a part of God. I would amend the saying 'cleanliness is next to godliness' and say 'cleanliness is godliness'. But only if cleanliness is both internal and external can we call it an attribute of God".²⁰ Emphasizing the value of spinning and its beneficent effects, he would see God in that activity. Writing to Kantilal Gandhi, he says: "And true devotion to God as I see it now is devotion to *Sūtranārāyana* [God in the form of yarn] ... The word *Satyanārāyana* [God in the form of Truth] is well-known. But as God of action it is *Sūtranārāyana* who reveals Himself to me".²¹

At this last stage, he began to see God more and more as the All-Permeating-Law of the universe. He asserts: "God may be called by any other name so long as it connotes the living Law of Life—in other words, the Law and the Law-Giver rolled into one".²² And as such, God is not personal in the normal sense of the word. Replying to a certain Roy Walker of London, he writes:

*I do not believe in a personal deity, but I believe in the Eternal Law of Truth and Love which I have translated as non-violence. This Law is not a dead thing like the law of a king. It is a living thing—the Law and the Law-giver are one. For those who realize this Truth, the Law-giver becomes a personal deity.*²³

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur on March 18, 1947: "My meaning of *brahmaçārya* is this: One who never has any lustful intention, who by constant attendance upon God has become proof against conscious or unconscious emissions, who is capable of lying naked with naked women, however beautiful they may be, without being in any manner whatsoever sexually excited. Such a person should be incapable of lying, incapable of intending or doing harm to a single man or woman in the whole world, is free from anger and malice and detached in the sense of *Bhagavadgītā*. Such a person is a full *brahmaçāri*. *Brahmaçāri* literally means a person who is making daily and steady progress towards God and whose every act is done in pursuance of that end and no other" [CW LXXXVII (1947) no. 108, p. 108].

²⁰ Letter, November 11, 1945, in CW LXXXII (1945-1946) no. 117, p. 75.

²¹ Letter, August 5, 1945, in CW LXXXI (1945) no. 127, p. 76-77 (parentheses are mine).

²² *Harijan*, April 14, 1946, in CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 434, p. 372-373.

²³ Letter, September 18, 1944, in CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 291, p. 399; cf. also CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 152, p. 141

It is this consideration that God and His Laws are identical that made him dabble ever more increasingly in nature cures. He became convinced that repetition of *Rāmanāma* (God's name: it did not matter what specific name one uses for God), with steady faith coupled with a strict observance of the Laws of nature, is enough for a cure, in fact, it would even prevent disease: "*Rāmanāma* when it is uttered not merely by lips but proceeds from the heart is a sovereign remedy for the triple woes (physical, mental and spiritual) to which man is subject".²⁴ This repetitive recitation is done with understanding and devotion. It is not superstitious, he felt, since one could even dispense with the vocal recitation, provided one keeps the Laws of nature perfectly:

*He and His Laws are one. To observe His Law is, therefore, the best form of worship. A man who becomes one with the Law does not stand in need of vocal recitation of the name. In other words an individual with whom contemplation of God has become as natural as breathing, is so filled with God's spirit that knowledge of observance of the Law becomes second nature as it were with him. Such one needs no other treatment.*²⁵

From 1945, his meetings regularly included the *Rāmdhun* (repetitive, musical recitation of *Rāma*'s name).

Since at this stage he had emphasized God as Law and Law-giver, he has no problem about predestination or about the way God acts in nature. Consequently answering a question he says:

*The Almighty is not a person like us. He or It is the greatest living Force or Law in the world. Accordingly He does not act by caprice, nor does that Law admit of any amendment or improvement. His will is fixed and changeless, everything else changes every second.*²⁶

And he goes on to say that this does not mean that there should not be any effort on our part but that our effort must be along the law of nature.

This perception of God as Law, he would perhaps say, is beyond reason. In a discussion with a Harijan graduate, who was doing service but was not convinced about God's existence, he remarks:

²⁴ CW LXXXIV (1946) no. 35, p. 29.

²⁵ Harijan, March 24, 1946, in CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 273, p. 235; cf. also no. 369, p. 312; no. 305, p. 263-264; no. 361, p. 302; cf. CW LXXXIV (1946) no. 27, p. 22-24; no. 296, p. 237.

²⁶ Harijan, July 28, 1946, in CW LXXXV (1946) no. 11, p. 12.

Like most of those who have had Western education, you have got an analytical mind. But there are things that can't be analyzed. God who can be analyzed by my poor intellect won't satisfy me. Therefore I do not try to analyze Him. I go behind the relative to the absolute and I get my peace of mind.²⁷

And he also tells him that man becomes man by becoming a bearer of God:

As for the relationship between man and God, man does not become man by virtue of having two hands. He becomes man by becoming a tabernacle of God ... unless we have realized that the body is the house of God, we are less than men.²⁸

In a discussion with a friend, he remarks that we pray to the unknown, unnamable but knowable and so a searchable God whom we search with faith slowly and steadily and reach out to Him beyond reasoning.²⁹ This God is not far away. He is within us and he notes with emphasis:

To seek God one need not go on pilgrimage or light lamps fed with gh̥ēe [butter oil] and burn incense before the image of the deity or anoint it or paint it with vermillion. For he resides in our hearts. If we could humbly obliterate in us the consciousness of our physical body, we would see Him face to face.³⁰

Summing up this section, we could say that, at this final stage, his search for Truth-God was ever keen and he explored the very frontiers of genuine search. He remained open and sincere in this seeking and wanted that Truth should prevail both in personal life and in the life of the nation. The concept of God that he stressed much at this stage was God as the Law and the Law-giver, with Whom ('It') we identify by following His Laws.

III. A genuine concern for others as an integral part of a search for Truth-God

As in the previous stages, in this final stage, too, his search took the concrete shape of service to the poor and helpless. Accordingly in a letter dated July 5, 1947, he notes:

²⁷ Discussion with D. Ramaswami around August 3, 1944, in CW LXXVIII (1944) no. 7, p. 7.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ CW LXXVIII (1944) no. 8, p. 8-9.

³⁰ Letter, June 10, 1947, in CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 94, p. 122 (parenthesis is mine).

*Seeing God does not mean seeing a being like man, with two hands and two feet and holding a conch, a disc and mace. Seeing God means getting an opportunity of serving humanity, it means serving the poor and making ourselves blessed through service.*³¹

For him, this service took various shapes and included even such things as the advocacy of nature cures, village upliftments, easing of communal tensions, basic education, promotion of a national language besides the solving of numerous social problems that straddled Indian society. In fact, one can discover newer areas for service according to different circumstances and situations but what is of importance is that we adopt the right attitude, namely the attitude of service born of *ahimsā* which alone leads one to the fullness of Truth-God.

A. The basis for this service is human solidarity

An idea that was present all along comes to the fore during this final stage. He was convinced that the good or evil that a person does has an invisible effect all around. We are all inter-connected. It was this thought that provoked him to try the questionable *brahmaçārya* experiment that we mentioned in the second section above. His victory in the field of *brahmaçārya*, he thought would benefit others. He would not let the complacent satisfy themselves by saying that some unfortunate events were caused, not by themselves, but by hooligans: "Who are the hooligans? Will there be none when English rule is no more? The fashion of blaming the hooligans ought to be given up. We are the makers of the brand. They respond to the air about them".³² The good effects of a noble, non-violent, sacrificial act are also sometimes not perceived readily, nevertheless, they are present. Reflecting over two incidents where volunteers had died in the course of efforts at pacifying mobs, he says:

*I do not think for a moment it has gone in vain. We may not see the effects today. Our non-violence is as yet a mixed affair. It limps. Nevertheless, it is there and it continues to work like leaven in a silent and invisible way, least understood by most. It is the only way.*³³

³¹ Letter, July 5, 1947, in CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 257, p. 278.

³² *Harijan*, March 3, 1946, in CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 195, p. 175.

³³ *Harijan*, October 27, 1946, in CW LXXXV (1946) no. 625, p. 482.

Communal troubles had caused havoc in Bihar. Forces of evil seemed to be victorious and the world seemed to go topsy-turvy but Gandhi encouraged them to noble endeavour. Speaking at a prayer meeting, he asserted:

*So long as there is even one good man in the world, the world belongs to the good. If everyone turns evil, the world will go to satan. But satan has no real existence. In fact satan is a name of evil. On reflection we will realize that even if there is one good man the world will go on as the result of his noble endeavour.*³⁴

His life of simplicity was also rooted in his desire of being one with the millions. Hence we find him using an interesting expression, especially from 1946, which points to the simple guide-line he had devised for himself and the volunteers, namely, not to have "what millions cannot have".³⁵ Thus he would want that if India has to make a name for itself in the world as a nation and be given to high thinking, it has to adopt a simple but ennobled life. Nor should we wait for the whole nation to do so: "If plain life is worth living, then the attempt is worth making even though only an individual or a group makes the effort".³⁶ Evidently, Gandhi was a man of action and would not want anyone to plead inability. We shall consider this below.

B. The basis for this service is human dignity

He continued to uphold the basic dignity of a human being. Anything that lowered human dignity, he would oppose with might and main. His constant advice to all *satyāgrahi* prisoners was that they should obey all prison rules and orders but if any interfered with their human dignity, then they should not obey but learn to oppose it in non-violent way, taking recourse to even the extreme measure of fast unto death (this was not new but what he had advocated even while leading *Satyāgraha* Movement in South Africa). Thus to one who asked Gandhi to intervene and stop a fast unto death that was going on in a certain place, he responds: "What else can one do but resort to a fast when one is treated as less than human? I do not dare

³⁴ Speech at Patna, April 15, 1947, in *CW LXXXVII* (1947) no. 262, p. 288-289.

³⁵ Cf. Letter to an *āśram* inmate, August 25, 1946, in *CW LXXXV* (1946) no. 189, p. 175-176; no. 236, p. 205.

³⁶ *CW LXXXV* (1946) no. 237, p. 206.

to intervene. Have faith in God and put up with whatever happens".³⁷ In an interview to the Press on July 19, 1944, he gave out his reaction to the World War and the killings that went on. He considered it to be not in keeping with human dignity: "I cannot look at this butchery going on in the world with indifference. I have an unchangeable faith that it is beneath the dignity of men to resort to mutual slaughter".³⁸

At this final stage, another thought which has been running all along becomes further clarified: it is the feeling of 'helplessness' and the resultant bane of fatalism that pervaded Indian society. Gandhi had seen intuitively the malaise in India. The foreign rule had encouraged them to give in to a feeling of helplessness; the nation, as he often said, had been emasculated. The Hindu Scriptures themselves had been interpreted to lull the nation into passivity. Gandhi set about rousing the people from this lethargy and clearing away the accumulated problems that faced the country. To move the people to action, he reinterpreted the *Gītā* as an earnest plea for action, not however, a selfish action but an action without attachment to the fruits thereof. Such an action would, he felt, change the situation for the better. He wanted to start with a simple action where one could easily see the result and be consequently encouraged. Thus he advocated the spinning wheel as early as 1908 while he was still in South Africa.³⁹ It was something that all could engage in and hence no one need be unemployed or give in to feelings of helplessness. Self-help and action were symbolized in spinning. It was the sign of freedom. He did not advocate it merely as an economic proposition, though it could be so at times. Similarly, during the post-war year of 1946, there was a fear of wide-spread famine but he would not want the nation to give in to any feeling of helplessness or fear. He began to speak of growing more food, using all available space and means: even flower gardens could begin growing vegetables instead and a few greens could be cultivated in pots. The idea was that something could definitely be done.⁴⁰ Dur-

37 Letter to Radhikadevi around July 26, 1944, in CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 329, p. 425.

38 *The Hindu*, July 22, 1944, in CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 298, p. 406.

39 Cf. CW LXXXV (1946) no. 393, p. 320-321; no. 415, p. 335-336; cf. also CW LXXXI (1945) no. 143, p. 88; no. 172, p. 108.

40 Cf. CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 134, p. 127-128; no. 123, p. 120-121; cf. also CW LXXXII (1945-1946) no. 201, p. 146, where he says: "I become more and more confirmed that self-reliance is the key to our success".

ing this stage, he began to write to those who asked for his blessings on their projects, that no special blessings are needed when the work is good: the blessings and rewards are contained in the good work itself. Severe communal troubles, in the wake of partition of India, brought from him the same response of needed action. He told women that instead of submitting themselves helplessly to dishonour, they should commit suicide or even use weapons if need be! To the villagers on both sides of the border who were fleeing helplessly, his advice was firm:

*You must stick to your villages in the face of any aggression and violence. Fight violence with non-violence if you can and if you can't do that, fight violence by any means, even if it means your utter extinction. But in no case should you leave your hearths and homes to be looted and burnt.*⁴¹

They have reason enough to be brave and not behave as if helpless. The reason is: they are human beings and have the basic human dignity; the divine spark was in them. In a prayer-meeting speech at New Delhi on June 11, 1947, he says:

*Man is born to be brave. Man is not born to become cowardly or to become scared. Man is part of God. He has in him the divine spark. I have not heard that a cow or bullock or a horse partakes of the divine spark. It is true that as all creatures are creatures of God, we are more or less alike. But the difference between man and other creatures is that we do not say of the latter, as we can about man, that they have in them the divine spark. Then if we have the divine spark, is it so that we may become frightened of each other or is it so that we may love each other?*⁴²

The thought of human dignity made him sensitive to the injustice being perpetrated on the so-called low castes. No one is to be classified as low because of the type of work he was doing. Thus in exasperation he exclaims:

*I fail to understand why others regard Harijans as inferior. I have myself become a **Bhangi**. If I swept your lanes and cleaned latrines, and you hurled abuses at me and I tolerated them, how would I then become low? Those who are engaged in scavenging are not inferior but it is those who abuse others that are low.*⁴³

⁴¹ The Hindu, November 9, 1946, in CW LXXXVI (1946-1947) no. 115, p. 86; cf. also no. 118, p. 89, where he tells terror stricken Hindus in Noakhali: "Your trouble is not numerical inferiority but the feeling of helplessness that has seized you and the habit of depending on others. The remedy lies with you".

⁴² CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 105, p. 134.

⁴³ Speech at Patan on March 25, 1947, in CW LXXXVII (1947) no. 154, p. 159.

His favourite description of himself was: "I am a *Bhangi*".⁴⁴ Similarly, when towards the beginnings of 1947, a discussion went on as to who would be the likely candidate for the presidency in free India, he proposed his own surprising choice to emphasize the basic human dignity of every person in India:

*... if I have my way, the President of the Indian Republic will be a chaste and brave Bhangi girl. If an English girl of 17 could become the British Queen and later even Empress of India [Queen Victoria], there is no reason why a Bhangi girl of robust love of her people and unimpeachable integrity of character should not become the first President of the Indian Republic ... By electing a Harijan girl to that office, we shall demonstrate our soul-force. We shall show to the world that in India there is no one high and no one low.*⁴⁵

Notice here that the person is to be a *Bhangi* (one belonging to the sweeper caste and wrongly considered to be low) and that too a woman (unthinkable, considering the many disabilities society had imposed on women at that time).

From 1945, the ideological differences between him and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the future Prime Minister of India, grew. He tried to bridge these differences to the best extent possible through correspondence and meetings. Nehru was for rapid industrialization, a big public sector and vast central governmental control, whereas Gandhi stood for village self-dependency and a minimum of big industries. It is noteworthy to remember that he was not totally against big industries; a few would be needed for the common good, especially those which manufactured goods which villagers needed but could not manufacture. However, he would not want any industry which supplants village industries or dispenses with human labour. He did not want India to go into competition with the West or adopt Western methods. He was for minimizing one's needs. Again, the key to this thinking was the ability of every individual and even the smallest unit to stand on its own legs to the extent possible and neither feel helpless nor look constantly for help from the government or from outside agencies. He was not for the beggar's bowl which was not in keeping with human dignity. In the course of his discussion with Nehru he notes:

⁴⁴ CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 113, p. 146.

⁴⁵ Speech at prayer meeting in Delhi on July 27, 1947, in CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 189, p. 224. (parenthesis is mine).

*The sum and substance of what I want to say is that the individual person should have control over things that are necessary for the sustenance of life. If he cannot have such control, the individual cannot survive. Ultimately, the world is made up only of individuals. If there were no drops there would be no ocean.*⁴⁶

His analysis of the situation of villages (then about 700,000), under the British rule is also interesting. He speaks of a time in pre-British era when villages were self-sufficient. They paid only a part of their crops as tax to the king but the villagers managed their own affairs without any money, using voluntary services through which they kept their roads in good order, protected themselves and cooperated with one another in all their public affairs and settled all disputes within their village assemblies. With the coming of the British rule, the Englishmen demanded money as tax with the ostensible purpose of public works for the villages. This meant that the villagers had to economize their needs and sell their crops at low rates in the cities and towns. When the crops failed, they had to borrow money on interest at exorbitant rates or mortgage their lands to pay taxes. The result was growing poverty, malnutrition and even loss of their lands. The villagers became lethargic, gave no voluntary service and expected the Government to lay and repair roads; autocratic police and government-paid-officials wielded authority; they were dragged to courts in town to settle their disputes, employing lawyers at high fees to defend them. Consequently, the helplessness of the villagers grew apace and they lost their sense of human dignity. Gandhi wanted free India to reverse this process and make the villagers self-reliant. He felt that there ought not to be too much of a centralizing, big government machinery which would only lead to power politics and resultant corruption. Asked about his vision of independent India, he writes in *Harijan* dated July 28, 1946: "... every village will be a republic or *pan-chāyat* (governed by a group of five elected elders) having full powers".⁴⁷ He goes on to describe how this village unit would be related to other village units in ever-widening circles:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one

⁴⁶ CW LXXXI (1945) no. 569, p. 320; the whole discussion is interesting (p. 319-321).

⁴⁷ CW LXXXV (1946) no. 26, p. 32.

*life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units ... Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.*⁴⁸

Thus he wanted every unit to find its strength and never feel the helplessness which crushed them. His very last document, written one day before he was shot dead, spells out this programme in detail for the consideration of CWC (Congress Working Committee),⁴⁹ but sadly enough it was not accepted by the CWC. Gandhi was no more there to explain it or advocate it. Added to it was the fact that in that document Gandhi had advocated the disbandment of the Congress as a political organization to be transformed into a social service organization. It is no wonder, the Congressmen could not accept it and they gave it up as utopian. The result is we see today a vast government machinery which carries on in the alien British style and, being unsuited, has engendered corruption and the villagers continue to be helpless, looking to others for help, instead of setting about to help themselves in human dignity.⁵⁰

In this way, Gandhi's search for Truth-God enabled him to seek to serve his fellow countrymen by helping them to realize their oneness as well as their individual human dignity. Their actions good or bad affected the whole society and everything is not lost, as long as there were individuals who were ready to put their best step forward. At this final stage, his insistence on action, in the form of self-help, was to enable his countrymen to wake up from their lethargy induced by the long misrule or ill-adapted policies of the British. He wanted them to shake off all sense of helplessness and realize their human dignity and not let themselves drift in the tide of times.

⁴⁸ CW LXXXV (1946) no. 26, p. 33-34; cf. also his reasoning against the introduction of too many big mills and heavy machinery displacing labourers and the scandalous neglect of villages [CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 177, p. 213; no. 224, p. 252].

⁴⁹ PYARELAL, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. II, Appendix B, p. 819-820.

⁵⁰ Cf. an enlightening article by KANTOWSKY, D., "Gandhi —Coming Back from West to East?", in IFDA (International Federation for Develoepment Alternatives), dossier 39 (1984) 4-14.

IV. The means of prosecuting this search for Truth-God

A. Life of prayer as means in the search for Truth-God

At this final stage prayer remained the mainstay of his life of service. The prayer form that increasingly attracted him was *Ramdhun* which was a rhythmic repetition of *Rama's* name by the assembly to the accompaniment of *tala*, i.e. the keeping of time with clapping or using a small hand cymbal. He felt that this common prayer effected an ideal atmosphere of peace and unity for his prayer meetings. Thus speaking at a prayer meeting at Bombay on February 18, 1946 he notes:

*Congregational prayer is a means of establishing the essential unity through common worship. Mass singing of Rāmdhun and the beating of tāla are its outward expression. If they are not mechanical performance but are an echo of the inner unison, as they should be, they generate a power and an atmosphere of sweetness and fragrance which has only to be seen to be realized.*⁵¹

Accordingly, since congregational prayer was a means of establishing essential human unity and an expression of it, he refused to go ahead with it, when in Delhi there was a protest from a young man to the recitation of Koranic verses. This he did for three consecutive days from April 1-3, 1947. Only on the fourth day there was no objector and he could complete the prayer service but he felt that even in those days when common prayer was interrupted, prayer went on in their hearts and it, at the same time, provided an opportunity for an examination of conscience:

*I am extremely grateful to God that today on the fourth day He allowed us to have our prayer in peace. Let me also tell you that nobody should think that no prayers were held during these days. When you came here, I came here and we all set in silence, it was as good as praying, because there was prayer in our hearts. I am grateful to them because I had an opportunity to look into my heart. I had no opportunity before to examine my heart about the question of prayer. I had to search within to find out where I stood. Was there anger in my heart against them? Did my prayer mean something different?*⁵²

Increasingly he practised the recitation of *Rāmanāma* even in private so that he felt that it was the constant breath of his life. Thus, for him, congregational prayer and individual prayer went hand in hand. He speaks of it in this manner:

⁵¹ *Harijan*, March 3, 1946, in *CW LXXXIII* (1946) no. 162, p. 153

⁵² *CW LXXXVII* (1947) no. 186, p. 205; cf. also the days when he was blocked, no. 175, p. 183 sq.; no. 178, p. 189-190, no. 181, p. 194-198.

*I have remarked often enough that without individual prayer, collective prayer is not of much use. I hold that individual prayer is a prelude to collective, as the latter, when it is effective, must lead to the individual. In other words, when a man has got to the stage of heart prayer, he prays always, whether in the secret or in the multitude.*⁵³

He did not want any commercialism to enter into prayer. A certain person had attributed his getting of a licence renewed quickly, to the prayers of Gandhi and in gratitude had sent a cheque for his projects. Gandhi returned it with a note:

*If sometimes I pray for someone I do not charge for it. No one should. A prayer can never be a thing for sale. A prayer has to come only from the heart. If the renewal of your licence was delayed what prayer could I have offered and how could I have offered it? Neither I nor anyone else has the power to change the law of nature. God knows best what is good for everyone and ordains accordingly. I am therefore returning your cheque. I want to remove the misapprehension in your mind that you succeeded in your design because I prayed for you. You must know that I did not pray for your licence nor could it have anything to do with prayer.*⁵⁴

B. Life of simplicity, dedication and service as means in this search

In line with his persistent thinking that God is present in a special way in the lives of the poor, he continued to live a simple life and identified himself with the lowest in society. This is why he took to living in Harijan quarters in Delhi during 1946. But it was somewhat of a farce since his industrialist friend D.G. Birla had to arrange at great cost a simple dwelling with conveniences at the out-skirts of the Harijan colony. Gandhi was aware of the anomaly and declared at a prayer meeting in Delhi on April 1, 1946:

*I, however, do not delude myself with the belief that by staying here I am sharing the actual life with the Harijans. I have seen some Harijan quarters, and the squalor, the dirt and the filth in the midst of which the Harijans live. I know too that this place has been brightened up. Indeed I feel embarrassed by the amenities that have been provided here by Seth Birla for me and my party ...*⁵⁵

⁵³ CW LXXXV (1946) no. 391, p. 318.

⁵⁴ Letter to Lalachand on June 27, 1945, in CW LXXX (1945) no. 634, p. 376-377

⁵⁵ CW LXXXIII (1945-1946) no. 413, p. 350; no. 368, p. 311; no. 385, p. 326; Ved Mehta notes: "Ironically, it was not easy, either, to maintain Gandhi in his exacting, simple style of life, especially when he and his entourage were travelling from village to village or from continent to continent. The poet Sarojini Naidu, who has been described as 'the licensed jester of the Mahatma's little court', once quipped, 'It costs a great deal of money to keep Gandhi living in poverty'" (MEHTA, V.P., *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles*, New York, 1977, p. 56).

But when opportunities presented themselves, to experience the deprivations of the poor, he gladly took them. Thus he had a hard time in Noakhali, in Bengal. Similarly, during a journey to Simla to meet the Viceroy in June 1945, Gandhi travelled by train in sweltering heat, disturbed often at way side stations by the crowds that had gathered. The American Press Correspondent, Preston Grover, who travelled with Gandhi on this occasion passed on a note to him suggesting that Gandhi may 'give himself a break' and take rest in the cooler Congress car for the afternoon. Gandhi, however, wished to experience the sufferings of real India and replied in writing (since it happened to be his silence day): "... let me melt in this natural heat ... Let me feel just a touch of real India".⁵⁶ He also wanted the Congress ministers to be simple in their lives and be close to the people. Hence he would advise them to use motor cars sparingly and only for official purposes and for going long distances; they should engage themselves in an hour's manual labour (spinning or gardening); they should endeavour to live close to the other ministers for better coordination; they ought to have fewer servants and try to do much of the work by themselves, avoid costly furnitures, be freed from addictions and vices; they should know the local and national languages.⁵⁷ His advice to all those who sought God was also similar. Simplicity and disciplined plain living was the key note. Accordingly, to a Christian missionary's question, he replied:

*You will wish to know what are the marks of a man who wants to realize Truth which is God. He must be completely free from anger and lust, greed and attachment, pride and fear. He must reduce himself to zero and have perfect control over all his senses beginning with the palate or tongue. Tongue is the organ of speech as well as taste. It is with the tongue that we indulge in exaggeration, untruth and speech that hurts. The craving for taste makes us slaves to the palate so that like animals we live to eat. But with proper discipline, we can make ourselves into beings only a 'little below the angels'. He who has mastered his senses is first and foremost among them. All virtues reside in him. God manifests Himself through them. Such is the power of self-discipline and self-purification.*⁵⁸

He also speaks of regular observance of silence as an important means: "He who wants to see truth and take shelter in God must observe at least one day

⁵⁶ CW LXXX (1945) no. 608, p. 363.

⁵⁷ Cf. CW LXXXVII (1947) no. 286, p. 311-312.

⁵⁸ CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 35, p. 57.

of weekly silence. I say it on the strength of my own experience of silence on Mondays".⁵⁹

He exhibited, as in the previous stages, a keen awareness for situations of exploitation. He felt much for the continued disabilities of Harijans and he wanted the Congress to take adequate measures to remove them and not be a party to the continuation of the exploitation. He warns them: "If the Congress exploits Harijans instead of serving them, the Congress will have to pay dearly for it. I believe in the universal law that the exploiter digs his own grave".⁶⁰ Similarly, he has a note of warning to all mankind. Writing in a preface to the book **Capitalism, Socialism or Villagism** by Dr. Bharatan Kumarappa, he notes: "Certain it is that mankind, if it continues along its mad career of exploitation of the weak by the strong, must rush to annihilation foretold in all religions".⁶¹

He was able to see through the argument that British troops would be needed to keep communal harmony in India. He boldly asserts that the British troops would be only protecting their mercantile interests:

*... the British troops are in India not to protect India but to protect British interests which were imposed on India and which are now so well entrenched that even the British Government cannot dislodge them. The British did not come here as philanthropists, nor is there any altruism in their continued stay here or the continuation of their troops, all that might be claimed to the contrary not withstanding.*⁶²

He gave his own enlightening interpretation to the aphorism: "Education is that which liberates". Asked by someone what one is to do after studies since the educational system as it then existed was geared only to help the oppressive rulers, he replies through **Harijan**, dated March 10, 1946:

The ancient aphorism, "Education is that which liberates" is as true today as it was before. Education here does not mean mere spiritual knowledge nor does liberation signify only spiritual liberation after death. Knowledge includes all training that is useful for the service of mankind, and liberation means freedom from all manner of servitude even in the present life. Servitude is of two kinds: slavery to domination from outside

⁵⁹ Letter on June 10, 1947, in **CW LXXXVIII** (1947) no. 91, p. 121.

⁶⁰ Letter to P. Ramamoorthy, September 19, 1945, in **CW LXXXI** (1945) no. 467, p. 267.

⁶¹ **CW LXXXI** (1945) no. 483, p. 272-273.

⁶² **CW LXXXVI** (1946-1947) no. 66, p. 50.

*and to one's own artificial needs. The knowledge acquired in the pursuit of this ideal alone constitutes true study.*⁶³

He was accused of being at least the cause of much lawlessness in the country. He was told that his programmes may be good for a knowledgeable few but not for all since it would result in upsetting order. He replied vigorously:

*I need hardly say that it is a thoughtless charge. The lawlessness, if it can be so described, that I have advocated is like prescribing wholesome and necessary food for the body. Behind my 'lawlessness' there is discipline, construction and well being of society. It is an effective protest against unjust and injurious law or act. It can never take the form of selfish evasion of duty ... The answer to the argument that whilst my programme may be good enough for a select few, it can never be for the masses, lies in the question whether I am expected to starve the masses of good food for fear of their taking bad or poisonous food.*⁶⁴

During this final stage, Socialists and Communists asked him many questions. Pyarelal mentions that Gandhi had read Marxist literature during his prison term and in a conversation with Pyarelal he is supposed to have said: "I think I could have written Marx better than Marx, provided of course, I had his scholarship which I do not have. He has a knack of making even simple things appear difficult".⁶⁵ In Midnapore (Bengal), he was asked whether he thought class struggle was inevitable and he had replied that class struggle had been there always and the way to end it was not through violence. What was needed, he said, is a realization on the part of both Capitalism and Labour about their mutual need.⁶⁶ His recommendation was the introduction of a system of 'trusteeship' whereby the Capitalists and landlords become trustees and with enlightened cooperation of labourers and peasants proceed to enjoy the benefits which belong to all. Thus speaking at a prayer meeting in Patna on April 18, 1947:

... if the peasants and labourers will think of destroying others, they will themselves be ruined ... if the landlords and the capitalists still exploited

⁶³ CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 238, p. 208 (emphasis is mine).

⁶⁴ *Harijan*, October 6, 1946, in CW LXXXV (1946) no. 499, p. 397.

⁶⁵ PYARELAL, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, vol. II, p. 136. Gandhi would say that it is not the environment that makes us what we are but rather we make the environment. Gandhi also said: "I do not accept his [Marx] economic theories but this much I know that the poor are being ground down. Something had got to be done for it. Marx set about to do that in his own way. He had acumen, scholarship, genius" (p. 139).

⁶⁶ Cf. the report in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 5, 1946, in CW LXXXII (1945-1946) no. 459, p. 335.

the peasants and labourers they were harming their own interests. They would never survive if they behaved like masters. They could, if they agreed to act as trustees. If I am a millionaire, I should spend my wealth on those who help me in my accumulation of the millions. It is only when I do this that I can be called a trustee. But I cannot be a trustee if I appropriate Rs. 1,000 and indulge in luxuries when I actually need only Rs. 5 or Rs. 50.⁶⁷

And when he was asked what he would do if the trustee were not honest, he replied that *satyāgraha* and non-violent non-cooperation was always there readily available to remove a truant trustee or bring sense into him.

He was particular about the means employed because one of the cardinal principles he had been following was a preoccupation with using pure means. He would never subscribe to the theory that the end justifies the means. He writes in *Harijan*, dated July 6, 1947:

Impure means result in an impure end. Hence the prince and the peasant will not be equalized by cutting off the prince's head, nor can the process of cutting off equalize the employer and the employee. One cannot reach truth by untruthfulness. Truthful conduct alone can reach truth. Are not non-violence and truth twins?⁶⁸

The only revolution that he would want in India is what he so interestingly calls "*evolutionary revolution*".⁶⁹ Hence he would tell the socialists to rather

... go and live among the poor in the villages, live as they live, be one with the village people, work for eight hours daily, use only village-made goods and articles even in your personal lives, remove illiteracy among the village people, eradicate untouchability and uplift women.⁷⁰

He would be rather hard on the communists. Thus in a conversation with them on June 8, 1947 he remarks:

Your principles are fine indeed. But you do not seem to follow them in practice, for you do not seem to know the difference between truth and falsehood or justice and injustice. What is more saddening about you is that, instead of having faith in India and drawing inspiration from its

⁶⁷ CW LXXXVII (1947) no. 281, p. 306.

⁶⁸ CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 262, p. 283; no. 239, p. 262-263.

⁶⁹ CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 205, p. 183 (emphasis is mine).

⁷⁰ Conversation with the Socialists on May 25, 1947, in CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 12, p. 15; cf. also no. 390, p. 424-425, where he calls them arm-chair socialists; no. 393, p. 427.

*unrivalled culture you wish to introduce Russian civilization here as if Russia was your motherland.*⁷¹

Perhaps it would be interesting to note that Soviet Russia gave its own interpretation of Gandhi according to Marxist-Leninist principles. In the beginning (pre-Stalin era), it was appreciative, but it changed when they thought that Gandhi had become a reactionary by letting slip the golden opportunity for a revolution under the popular sentiments of 1919-1921. He had stopped the process with the outbreak of violence and had suspended the Civil Disobedience Movement. They interpreted it as a cowardly act, perpetuating imperialism and capitalism. The Stalin era condemned Gandhi severely as a stooge in the hands of the imperialists and capitalists. Only at the end of the Stalin era and after receiving protests from India about certain entries in the Soviet encyclopedias denigrating Gandhi, the official attitude changed. From 1956, Gandhi has been assessed favourably.⁷²

During this final stage, his caste reform took a further step. He began to encourage not only inter-Provincial and inter-caste marriages but also marriage of caste-Hindus with Harijans. Accordingly, in a letter he says: "I am interested, if at all, in caste-Hindu marrying a Harijan ...".⁷³ He also wanted to have the marriage of two *āśram* friends to be conducted in Hindustani language by a Harijan Christian instead of the customary Hindu Brahmin with Sanskrit prayers and invocations.⁷⁴ His interest in constructive work, i.e. various social upliftment programmes to construct society went apace, though interrupted during his imprisonment and though they had been partially destroyed by the Government during the war. But the emphasis, as we have said earlier,⁷⁵ was on self-help to overcome the oppressive sense of helplessness and consequent lethargy. He considers that to be self-sufficient, could also be a kind of service we offer to society and

⁷¹ CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 75, p. 106.

⁷² Cf. TIDMARSH, K., "The Soviet Re-Assessment of Mahatma Gandhi", in (Iyer, R., ed.), *South Asian Affairs-Number One*, (St. Antony's Paper 8), London, 1960, p. 86-115.

⁷³ Letter to N. Vyasaġirth on November 16, 1945, in CW LXXXII (1945-1946) no. 132, p. 86.

⁷⁴ Letter to D.B. Kalelkar, August 8, 1945, in CW LXXXI (1945) no. 151, p. 95; Letter to Indumati Gunaji on August 10, 1945, in CW LXXXI (1945) no. 164, p. 103; Appendix II, p. 466-467.

⁷⁵ Cf. above, p. 223-224.

when we are obliged to seek assistance, it ought to be reckoned as a form of human cooperation. He offers an interesting train of reflection:

Our first duty is that we should not be a burden on society, i.e. we should be self-sufficient. That means self-sufficiency by itself is a kind of service. After becoming self-sufficient we should use our spare time for the service of others. If all become self-sufficient no one will have any difficulty. In that case no one will be required to undertake service of others. But we have not yet reached that stage and therefore we have to think of social service. Even if we succeed in realizing complete self-sufficiency, man being a social animal, we shall have to accept service in some form or other. That is, man is as much dependent on others as he is on himself. When dependence becomes necessary in order to keep society in good order it is no longer dependence but becomes cooperation ...⁷⁶

His concept of service was based on *dharma* or duty. In this way, performance of one's duty could also be service. Counselling one who had complained that he could not find time enough for public service, he writes:

*... it is the duty of people like you to give primary importance to the family responsibilities and devote to public service only as much time as you can after that. One who shoulders the burden of the family as *dharma* also renders service.⁷⁷*

Summing up this section, we could say that, at this last stage, his search for Truth-God continued even more. Constant prayer, especially *Rāmanāma*, became more deepened. He began to locate all his speeches in the context of congregational prayer, chiefly employing *Rāmadhun*. He sought his Truth-God not only in prayer but also in the simplicity of life, identifying himself with the poorest and the lowest. He expected others also to do likewise. The programme he envisaged for overcoming glaring inequalities in society could be best described in the phrase "evolutionary revolution" in the spirit of *ahimsā*.

V. *Satyāgraha* and *ahimsā* during this stage

In 1931, during the Round Table Conference in England, Gandhi had tried to meet all opponents (of independence for India) in England. He asked for a meeting with Winston Churchill but Churchill refused to meet Gandhi, the 'naked fakir' as he called him. Churchill continued his opposi-

⁷⁶ Answering question on November 29, 1945, in *CW LXXXII* (1945-1946) no. 191, p. 133.

⁷⁷ Letter to V.V. Dastane on October 23, 1945, in *CW LXXXI* (1945) no. 738, p. 411.

tion and was bent on crushing him. But Gandhi's response was that no one could succeed in crushing a genuine *satyāgrahi*:

*Mr Churchill does not want any settlement. He wants to crush me, if he has been correctly reported. He has never denied the report. The beauty of it, for me, and the pity of it, for him, is that no one can crush a **satyāgrahi**; for, he offers his body as a willing sacrifice and this makes the spirit free.*⁷⁸

But Gandhi was being disillusioned about the possibility of organizing *satyāgraha* on a mass scale. In the prevailing mood of 1944, when most of the Congress leaders and workers were in prison, he had his own doubts. Thus in a letter dated July 20, 1944, he notes:

*... there must be organized resistance to organized evil. The difficulty arises when the organizers of **satyāgraha** try to imitate the organizers of evil. I tried and failed hopelessly. The way of organizing forces of good must be opposite to the evil way. What it exactly is I do not yet know fully. I feel that it lies through perfection, as far as may be, of individuals. It then acts as the leaven rising ~~the~~ whole mass. But I am still groping.*⁷⁹

Here we see that Gandhi, who had tried mass movements, begins to doubt, not so much about its efficacy as about the possibility of organizing them on right lines, and seems to opt for an individual approach. At the same time, he realizes that he has to put up with imperfect co-workers. Thus he notes in a letter, under the same date: "Since we are imperfect ourselves we can make progress only by putting up with imperfect co-workers ... the world is good, if we are good".⁸⁰

By the end of the following year, when the war had ended and the Congress detenus had been freed, he got back his resilience. The Socialist wing of the Congress was becoming more active, especially as the prospect of independence loomed large on the horizon. Speaking to them in the middle of 1947, Gandhi tells them that they have to base themselves firmly on a belief in God because it is only through that they would be able to forge the

⁷⁸ *The Bombay Chronicle*, July 13, 1944, in *CW LXXVII* (1942-1944) no. 225, p. 348, with the corresponding footnote; repeated verbatim: no. 226, p. 351-352; cf. also letter to Agatha Harrison on July 13, 1944, in *CW LXXVII* (1942-1944) no. 255, p. 372; letter to Winston Churchill on July 17, 1944, in *CW LXXVII* (1942-1944) no. 279, p. 391.

⁷⁹ Letter to Amiya Chakravarty on July 20, 1944, in *CW LXXVII* (1942-1944) no. 300, p. 407 (emphases are mine). This is also an indication of the reason for his *brahmaçārya* experiment.

⁸⁰ Letter to Bhanushanker on July 20, 1944, in *CW LXXVII* (1942-1944) no. 303, p. 409.

invincible weapon of *satyāgraha* and overcome the various evils that beset society. Nor did he claim to know all the laws of *satyāgraha*. It still needed to be discovered and perfected but he had no doubt about its efficacy:

*... it is possible to say that it has perhaps never occurred to a believing socialist that there is any connection between his socialism and his belief in God. Equally, men of God perhaps never felt any need for socialism. Superstitions have flourished in the world in spite of godly men and women. In Hinduism which believes in God, untouchability has, till of late, held undoubted sway. The nature of this divine Force and its inexhaustible power have been matters of incessant quest. My claim is that in the pursuit of that quest lies the discovery of *satyāgraha*. It is not however, claimed that all the laws of *satyāgraha* have already been formulated. I cannot say either that I myself know all the laws. This I do assert that every worthy object can be achieved through *satyāgraha*. It is the highest and the most potent means, the most effective weapon. I am convinced that socialism will not be reached by any other means. *Satyāgraha* can rid society of all evils, political, economic and moral.⁸¹*

By far, during this final stage, Gandhi does not speak as much of *satyāgraha* as he had done at the previous stages, but he lives his *satyāgraha*. This is especially true in the two important and dangerous fasts he undertook at Calcutta (September 1947) and Delhi (January 1948). Both these were not against any British imperialism but against his own people and these *satyāgraha* fasts achieved their purposes.

Though he did not speak and write much about *satyāgraha* during this last period, the same cannot be said about *ahimsā* regarding which he was questioned much. Events enabled him to think further and clarify the various implications of following the principle of *ahimsā*. A government pamphlet, entitled **Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances 1942-1943**, was published on February 22, 1943 (it was withdrawn in January 1946). It contained allegations against Gandhi and the Congress, accusing them of inciting the people to violence besides obstructing war efforts. Gandhi gave a spirited reply on July 15, 1943 to the Additional Secretary, Home Department, Government of India. It was a long, detailed refutation running into several pages.⁸² Earlier he had written a letter on May 21, 1943 to Sir Reginald Maxwell, Home Member, Government of India, in the course of which he says:

⁸¹ CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 322, p. 324-325.

⁸² CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 35, p. 105-199.

You are right in describing me as the leader of an open rebellion except for a fundamental omission, namely, strictly non-violent. This omission is on a par with the omission of 'not's from the Commandments and quoting them in support of killing, stealing, etc. You may dismiss the phrase or explain it away in any manner you like. But when you quote a person you may not omit anything from his language, especially an omission which changes the whole aspect of the thing.⁸³

When he was finally released from detention on May 6, 1944, some told him that in the politics of the day it was not possible to stick to non-violence or truth at all times. Speaking to Congressmen at Pune on May 29, 1944, he said:

I have been experiencing all along with the introduction of truth and non-violence in day-to-day life. Some people believe that truth and non-violence have no place in the practice of politics and public affairs. I do not agree. I have always believed that these weapons are entirely useless, if they are meant only for personal salvation.⁸⁴

Some others accused him of listening to Moderates and moneyed men (he had a number of friends and benefactors among big industrialists, e.g. G.D. Birla), the bourgeois class which did not want disturbances to their aim of making piles of money and wielding undisturbed power. Thus, they said, Gandhi was betraying the country. Gandhi's reply was:

I have never concealed the fact that I am a friend of everybody. Moderates, moneyed man, Englishmen, Americans or any other, irrespective of caste, colour or persuasion. My belief and practice are directly derived from my non-violence. My non-cooperation is non-cooperation with evil, not with the evil-doer. Underneath my non-cooperation is my earnest desire to wean the evil-doer from the evil or harm he is doing, so that I can give him hearty co-operation.⁸⁵

And he did not lose an opportunity of opposing these rich friends when they went wrong, nor did he flinch from fleecing them for the sake of the poor. And his own attitude towards anybody who considered himself a foe (of Gandhi) was to convert such a person into a friend: "... my non-violence draws no line between friend and foe. It makes a friend out of a foe".⁸⁶

⁸³ CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 27, p. 92.

⁸⁴ CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 220, p. 339 (emphasis is mine).

⁸⁵ CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 226, p. 384.

⁸⁶ CW LXXVII (1942-1944) no. 264, p. 382.

Yet others began to tell him that it would be wrong for him to expect that the people at large would be able to follow his principle of non-violence. It appeared to be more a spiritual or other-worldly principle, not fit for the world we live in. In a speech at AISA (All India Spinners' Association) on September 3, 1944, he defended the possibility of *ahimsā* being practised by all on a mass scale:

*... non-violence is not something of the other world. If it is, I have no use for it. I am of the earth and if non-violence is something really worth while I want to realize it here on this earth while I am still alive. The non-violence I want is one which the masses can follow in practice. And how else can it be realized except in a society which has compassion and other similar virtues as its characteristics?*⁸⁷

His faith in unconquerable non-violence and the capacity of the masses to be trained in it, remained undiminished even during the first quarter of 1946. The Second World War had not caused him to alter his opinion. Thus writing in a revived issue of *Harijan*, February 10, 1946, he greets his readers with rhetorical questions:

*Do I still adhere to my faith in truth and non-violence? Has not the atom bomb exploded that faith? Not only has it not done so but it has clearly demonstrated to me that the twins constitute the mightiest force in the world. Before it the atom bomb is of no effect. The two opposing forces are wholly different in kind, the one moral and spiritual, the other physical and material. The one is infinitely superior to the other which by its very nature has an end. The force of the spirit is ever progressive and endless. Its full expression makes it unconquerable in the world.*⁸⁸

At this stage, the request was repeated that he write a treatise on the science of *ahimsā*. As before, Gandhi refused to oblige. His response in *Harijan* on March 3, 1946 is both prophetic and revealing:

*To write a treatise on the science of ahimsā is beyond my powers. I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain, and what I understand, according to my lights, to be my duty, and what comes my way, I do. All my action is actuated by the spirit of service. Let anyone who can systematize ahimsa into a science do so, if indeed it lends itself to such a treatment ... Any such during my lifetime would necessarily be incomplete. If at all, it could only be written after my death. And even so let me give the warning that it would fail to give a complete exposition of ahimsā. No man has ever been able to describe God fully. The same holds true of ahimsā.*⁸⁹

⁸⁷ CW LXXVIII (1944) no. 97, p. 75-76.

⁸⁸ CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 69, p. 77.

⁸⁹ CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 201, p. 180.

He felt that the application of *ahimsā* seems to vary according to different circumstances. For himself, he says: "I can give no guarantee that I will do or believe tomorrow what I do or hold to be true today".⁹⁰ It was truly prophetic since the events that followed proved that he was right.

The 'Direct Action' unleashed by the Muslim League on August 16, 1946, to press the demand for an independent Pakistan, brought violence in many places. Muslims and Hindus slaughtered one another mercilessly. Violent events in one place provoked revenge in other places. Gandhi's principle of non-violence was on a severe trial. But he would not give up. It was not *ahimsā* that has failed, he said, but the techniques he employed for inculcating mass non-violence had failed. Thus replying to a questioner who had marshalled many facts and concluded that non-violence had failed to deliver the goods, he says:

*All you mention can certainly be called **himsā** (violence) but can never mean that the creed of non-violence has failed. At best it may be said that I have not yet found the technique required for the conversion of the mass mind.*⁹¹

Nevertheless, it was very painful for him. He proceeded to Noakhali in Bengal where, as a result of communal violence, hundreds of Hindus had been killed or forcibly converted; women had been raped or abducted. Writing on November 14, 1946 to Sardar Vallabhai Patel, a Congress leader and close associate, he notes: "The work here may be my last. If I survive this, it will be a new life for me. *My non-violence is being tested here in a way it has never been tested before*".⁹² It led him to ask himself serious questions about the validity of his *ahimsā* which he had all along described as a soul-force. It seemed to have lost all its infallible efficacy:

*Where do I stand? Do I represent this **ahimsā** in my person? If I do, then deceit and hatred that poison the atmosphere should dissolve. It is only by going into isolation from my companions, those on whose help I have relied all along, and standing on my own feet that I shall find my bearings and also test my faith in God.*⁹³

⁹⁰ CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 201, p. 180.

⁹¹ Harijan, November 17, 1946, in CW LXXXVI (1946-1947) no. 116, p. 87; cf. also no. 232, p. 183.

⁹² CW LXXXVI (1946-1947) no. 148, p. 119 (emphasis is mine)

⁹³ Harijan, December 8, 1946, in CW LXXXVI (1946-1947) no. 168, p. 134; cf. also no. 175, p. 138.

He sent away his companions to different villages and accompanied only by an interpreter and another companion, he toured the villages of Noakhali, constantly reflecting and trying to discover the answer. Gone were the huge crowds that used to attend his meetings elsewhere. He confessed himself to be in deep darkness.⁹⁴

Slowly he began to realize that he had made a mistake. When he had been speaking about non-violence, the masses had understood it differently. He found a distinction between non-violence of the brave and non-violence of the coward. What the crowds had been adopting all along was the imperfect and even a false non-violence of the coward, i.e. non-violent because they had no courage or means to be violent, though they would like to be violent if they had the means and opportunity. His reflection took this turn from January 1947. In a letter he wrote from Noakhali, he notes:

*By describing the non-violence of cowards as genuine non-violence, we bring discredit on the latter [non-violence of the brave]. It would be more correct to describe it as a device of the coward. We learnt the trick and that is why I have begun to feel a doubt about myself, whether all that I have learnt, and taught others to do, is to use a device of the coward. I, therefore, have come here to know the measure of my strength and let myself be tested.*⁹⁵

By the time he had moved on to Bihar in March 1947 to relieve the Muslims who had suffered there when the Hindus took revenge for the happenings in Noakhali, he had begun to stress the non-violence of the brave. Thus speaking to Muslim women, he encourages them not only to pray and rely on prayer but also to rely on courageous non-violence:

... if we can understand the secret of prayer, we would realize its wonderful power. Our independence will be stable if we attain it through prayer. But spiritually inclined men and women should also understand the secret of non-violence. We should realize that if non-violence is the non-violence of the weak, our independence will not be stable ... you should learn to efface the self and meet death bravely with prayer in your heart, whenever the occasion demands it. In order to cultivate the courage to meet death, prayer is the first and the last mantra of the art of dying. Im-

⁹⁴ Harijan, January 19, 1947, in CW LXXXVI (1946-1947) no. 232, p. 182-183; cf. also note to Pyarelal around December 4, 1946, in CW LXXXVI (1946-1947) no. 244, p. 195; letter to Agatha Harrison on December 5, 1946, in CW LXXXVI (1946-1947) no. 246, p. 196.

⁹⁵ Letter to Chhotubhai, a fellow worker, in CW LXXXVI (1946-1947) no. 394, p. 303 (parenthesis is mine).

*plicit faith is essential for it. Without faith, no satyāgrahi can ever succeed.*⁹⁶

When he moved on to Delhi in June 1947, he was able to give the fruit of his new realization. All along they had made a mistake of practising the non-violence of the weak and cowardly. The new situation demands that they should adopt non-violence of the brave. Speaking at a prayer meeting, he declares:

*... the ahimsā which we have practised during the last earlier thirty years has been ahimsā of the weak. Whether this view of mine is valid or not you will judge for yourselves. What has to be admitted is that in the changed conditions of today the ahimsā of the weak has no place. The truth is that India has not so far had an opportunity to practise the ahimsā of the brave. Nothing is gained by my repeating that no power in the world can stand before ahimsā of the brave. For the truth of this can only be proved by repeatedly and extensively manifesting it in life. So far as I can, I have endeavoured to manifest it in my life. Maybe I am not fully qualified, maybe I am a beggar.*⁹⁷

If he had distinguished between the non-violence of the coward and non-violence of the brave, he also makes a distinction between the violence of the brave and the violence of the coward variety. In a prayer meeting in Delhi on July 7, 1947, he observes:

*The violence we see today is the violence of the cowards. There is also such a thing as the violence of the brave. If four or five men enter a fight and die by the sword, there is violence in it but it is the violence of the brave. But when ten thousand armed men attack a village of unarmed people and slaughter them along with their wives and children it is the violence of cowards. America unleashed its atom bomb over Japan. That was the violence of the cowards. The non-violence of the brave is a thing worth seeing. I want to see that non-violence before I die. For this we should have inner strength. It is a unique weapon. If people had realized its beauty all the life and property that have been lost would never have been lost.*⁹⁸

He would also show how cowardly it was to take revenge in India on small groups of Muslims for the crimes committed in Pakistan against Hindus. Gandhi told them in irony that if they were so bent on returning violence for violence, they should do so by first enlisting in the army and then going over to Pakistan to fight armed Muslims there, for that would be violence of the

⁹⁶ Speech on April 27, 1947, in CW LXXXVII (1947) no. 343, p. 370-371.

⁹⁷ CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 124, p. 160.

⁹⁸ CW LXXXVIII (1947) no. 252, p. 274; no. 367, p. 357.

brave and far better than the violence of the cowards which they were exhibiting. Of course, this did not mean that he was encouraging violence or retaliation! He had already made it clear that the better way would be to die without ill-will or hatred and certainly not in a 'helpless' way:

*I am positive that India will not come into her own unless ... everyone has learnt the art of dying without ill-will, or even wishing that someone else will do away with the would be assassin.*⁹⁹

He had wished that for himself also. Thus in a conversation with visitors on June 17, 1947, he says:

*I say to you that if someone comes to kill you, do not be afraid and do not move from your place but let him kill you. I shall be content if, when someone comes to kill me, I can remain composed, let myself be killed and pray to God that He may grant good sense to the killer.*¹⁰⁰

A group of refugees had come to see him. They were from Rawalpindi and out of 1,000 only 18 had survived the slaughter by hiding themselves. He tells them in exasperation:

*It is more valiant to get killed than to kill. Of course my condition is that even if we are facing death we must not take up arms against them. But you take up arms and when you are defeated you come to me. Of what help can I be to you in these circumstances?*¹⁰¹

When violence broke out in Bombay, some had been silent witnesses. Gandhi would call such silence also as a form of cowardice and against *ahimsā* and the code of conduct for *satyāgrahis*:

Ahimsā calls for the strength and courage to suffer without retaliation, to receive blows without returning any. But that does not exhaust its meaning. Silence becomes cowardice when occasion demands speaking out the whole truth and acting accordingly.¹⁰²

Similarly, speaking at Bombay during a prayer meeting on March 14, 1946: "You are no *satyāgrahis*, if you remain silent or passive spectators while

⁹⁹ *Harijan*, October 20, 1946, in *CW LXXXV* (1946) no. 577, p. 450.

¹⁰⁰ *CW LXXXVIII* (1947) no. 367, p. 357.

¹⁰¹ -On April 4, 1947, in *CW LXXXVII* (1947) no. 184, p. 200.

¹⁰² *Harijan*, April 7, 1946, in *CW LXXXIII* (1946) no. 282, p. 242.

your enemy is being done to death. You must protect him even at the cost of your life".¹⁰³

At this last stage, he was also very definite about the doctrine of non-killing of animals. Earlier he had been very guarded. Now he speaks out boldly and clearly:

*My ahimsā is my own. I am not able to accept in its entirety the doctrine of non-killing of animals. I have no feeling in me to save the lives of animals which devour or cause hurt to man. I consider it wrong to help in the increase of their progeny. Therefore, I will not feed ants, monkeys or dogs. I will never sacrifice a man's life in order to save theirs. Thinking along these lines I have come to the conclusion that to do away with monkeys where they have become a menace to the well-being of man is pardonable. Such killing becomes a duty.*¹⁰⁴

At the conclusion of this section, we could sum up by saying: at this last stage, he does not speak much about *satyāgraha*, but is pressed with the necessity to clarify the notion of *ahimsā*. He discovered that he had been misled into thinking that the masses were practising genuine non-violence. The violent communal killings made him reflect and he made a distinction between non-violence of the brave and non-violence of the coward. Similarly, he made a distinction between the violence of the brave and the violence of the coward. He found that the masses had been practising only the non-violence and violence of the coward. He tried to clarify and show the nobility of non-violence of the brave which alone is genuine *ahimsā*.

VI. A dialectical tension between love of God and love for fellowmen at this stage?

During the violent communal tension and troubles of 1946-1948, Gandhi had endeavoured to put out the flames of communal passions. Those who were bent on revenge found him blocking their path. Hence some renewed the suggestion that had been made before, namely, that he should retire to the Himalayas and become a recluse. But Gandhi would not. His life-style and method were different. He was not seeking a personal salva-

¹⁰³ CW LXXXIII (1946) no. 300, p. 259.

¹⁰⁴ *Harijan*, May 5, 1946, in CW LXXXIV (1946) no. 75, p. 62; Letter, May 20, 1946, in CW LXXXIV (1946) no. 222, p. 176; *Harijan*, June 9, 1946, in CW LXXXIV (1946) no. 291, p. 231.

tion apart from his fellowmen. All his projects were for bringing the 'kingdom of God' to his fellowmen here on earth. Consequently, in a discussion with Midnapore (Bengal) political workers on January 2, 1946, he explains:

*The execution of the constructive programme in its entirety means more than swarāj. It means Rāmarājya, Khudai Sultānat or divine kingdom. I am thirsting after such Rāmarājya. My God does not reside up above. He has to be realized on earth. He is here, within you, within me. He is omnipotent and omnipresent. You need not think of the world beyond. If we can do our duty here, the 'beyond' will take care of itself.*¹⁰⁵

He had his own way of combining prayer and work. There is no either or but rather a unified whole. Work is done in a prayerful attitude, i.e. with prayer that goes on constantly in the heart. Thus to a question "Is it harmful if, owing to stress or exigencies of work, one is unable to carry out daily devotions in the prescribed manner? Which of the two should be given preference service or the rosary?", he replied: "Whatever the exigencies of service or adverse circumstances may be, *Rāmanāma* must not cease. The outward form will vary according to the occasion. The absence of the rosary does not interrupt *Rāmanāma* which has found an abiding place in the heart".¹⁰⁶ Eight months later, he comes back on it in another form. To a question "Would it not be better for a man to give the time he spends in worship to the service of the poor? If a man did this, would worship still be necessary for him?", Gandhi replied:

*I sense mental laziness and unbelief in the question. The biggest of **kar-mayōgis** [persons who follow the path of selfless action] never give up devotional singing and worship. Of course as a general principle it can be said that selfless service itself is worship and those who engage in it do not need any other kind of worship. But in truth **bhajans** [devotional songs with repeated phrases], etc. are a help in the work of service and keep the awareness of God ever fresh.*¹⁰⁷

He always felt that both human effort and Divine Grace are necessary for the success of any project. Hence in a letter he exhorts: "Let us therefore

¹⁰⁵ **Amrita Bazar Patrika**, January 5, 1946, in **CW LXXXII** (1945-1946) no. 459, p. 334; no. 540, p. 403; no. 489, p. 358.

¹⁰⁶ **Harijan**, February 17, 1946, in **CW LXXXIII** (1946) no. 106, p. 108.

¹⁰⁷ **Harijan**, October 13, 1946, in **CW LXXXV** (1946) no. 537, p. 420 (parentheses are mine).

cling to devout faith, and hope for human effort and Divine Grace. The effort should be sincere".¹⁰⁸

One of his ideals was to become a *śhitaprajña*, i.e. one who has an equipoise in life, who is unattached and untroubled. This was the ideal portrayed in his favourite book the *Gītā* 2,55-72. To this, Gandhi added his vision of selfless service corresponding to *niṣkāmakarma* (action done without attachment to the fruits thereof) as recommended by the *Gītā*. Manu Gandhi, his relative (grand-daughter of his cousin) and constant companion of the last year of his life asked him how he could let himself be troubled so much by the communal disturbances, if he really wanted to become a *śhitaprajña*; perhaps it would be better for him to withdraw from these turmoils? Gandhi's reply is in keeping with his life programme:

*Sitting in a forest or in solitude and pursuing knowledge is no doubt a kind of spiritual living, but to practise goodness while living in the world is, in my opinion, a more difficult kind of spiritual living. One may not be a scholar but one must show sympathy towards the poor and afflicted ... to endeavour to lighten their suffering.*¹⁰⁹

We see then, that love of God and love for man was for him not two diametrically opposed propositions but both are necessary, the one being an expression of the other. To love God means to have faith in the Truth Who is God, Who is Omnipotent, All-Pervading Law of life and be united to Him in constant, simple, trusting prayer and thus enter into the *ṛta* (rhythm) of the universe, i.e. the harmonious stream of all reality. To find Him means: not necessarily to find Him only in temples or other external religious practices but to find Him above all in our very hearts, in our human society and more particularly in the poor and lowly. The Truth-God demands that falsehood, i.e. every form of injustice should be removed so that Truth-God shines forth plainly in all that 'Is' (*Sat*). To love God means: not only to pray constantly either individually or in groups, but also to serve Him by serving the poor and oppressed; to be ready to suffer for them using the technique of genuine *satyāgraha* in a spirit of genuine *ahimsā* and thus assist in the process of the restoration of *Dharma*, the Law of the universe.

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Jamnadas Gandhi, September 17, 1946, in *CW LXXXV* (1946) no. 420, p. 338.

¹⁰⁹ *CW LXXXVIII* (1947) no. 128, p. 159.

Chapter V

Beyond Gandhi:

A critical appreciation

In this our final chapter we try to find a solution to the problem, we set out in a preliminary fashion in the introduction. The danger is always present that in our endeavour to find any new insight in Gandhi's writings, sayings and actions we may misinterpret him. Margaret Chatterjee, in her enlightening book **Gandhi's Religious Thoughts**, warns us rightly:

... if we are on the look out for a new theological breakthrough in Gandhi we may be disappointed. Gandhi had no great opinion of theologians, and mainly for the good reason that he did not think that religion was a matter to be talked about.¹

She is emphatic in saying that it would be wrong to construct any cogent philosophical or theological system from what he said or did:

It would be mockery if we were to induce any kind of philosophical system or theology from what he said and did, even more so, in the fashionable analytical manner, to pick away at the 'logic' or otherwise of his 'religious language'.²

An interesting example of systematization of Gandhi's thoughts into philosophical categories is presented by N. Raghavan Iyer in his book, **The Moral and Political Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi**.³ Similarly, Suman Khanna in her book, **Gandhi and the Good Life**, freely uses philosophical categories and comparisons with Western philosophers to interpret Gandhi.⁴ Margaret Chatterjee herself does not hesitate in instituting such comparisons with Western philosophers.⁵ I find it hard to believe that he had no personal philosophy. To me, he appears as a very practical philosopher, though not a systematic philosopher who sets out on a philosophical disquisition. He does

1 CHATTERJEE, Margaret, **Gandhi's Religious Thoughts**, London, 1983 (reprint 1985), p. 13.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

3 IYER, N.R., **The Moral and Political Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi**, New York, 1973.

4 KHANNA, Suman, **Gandhi and the Good Life**, New Delhi, 1985; cf. also DATTA, D.K., **Social, Moral and Religious Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi**, New Delhi, 1980.

5 CHATTERJEE, Margaret, **Gandhi's Religious Thoughts**.

not shy away from using Indian philosophical categories when the need arises, though he avoids entering into the intricacies of philosophy rarely going beyond general remarks. Buultjens finds Gandhi a riddle, not easy to analyze or understand in the modern setting and relegates his role to that of a moral prophet:

*It is, then, as a moral prophet that we should celebrate Gandhi. Seen against the panorama of history and mythology, he bears a close resemblance to the prophets of the Old Testament — crankish, irascible men who had few practical solutions, but whose message their contemporaries ignored at their peril. Gandhi may not have known how to put society right, but he did know what was wrong.*⁶

It is my contention that Gandhi was quite logical in his thought and action. This could be readily agreed to, if but we paid attention to his basic thought and vision: an earnest search for Truth. It is also my further contention that from such an honest seeker we have much to learn which could be of value in our understanding of the Christian faith. Thus, I am in sympathy with Harvé Chaigne when he says:

*... it is indeed vitally important that we **make the necessary discriminations and transpositions** and if possible, attempt to graft on to the profundities of Christianity what has up to now been nurtured by the spiritual traditions of Hinduism.*⁷

There is no need to foist any system on Gandhi to interpret him nor derive one from him, but what is needed is to be activated by his thought as a catalyst to the better understanding of Christianity. This, Gandhi himself would approve of and applaud since he never wanted any of his followers to change their religious allegiances but wanted them to be deepened in the practice of their own religion through participating in his 'programme'.⁸ He encouraged mutual enrichment of various religions through a generous sharing of

⁶ BUULTJENS, R., "Another Side of Gandhi", in *America* 148 (April 9, 1983) 274-278, p. 278.

⁷ CHAIGNE, H., "The Spirit and Techniques of Gandhian Non-violence" (trans. M.J. Corbin), in *Cross Currents* 11 (Spring 1961) 117-136, p. 119.

⁸ Cf. above, p. 43 (extract from a letter to Miss Ether Faering); also p. 117-118. Cf. also CW LVII (1934) no. 290, p. 278, a letter on March 15, 1934 to Margaret Spiegel, a German Jewess who had joined his *āśram* and taken the Indian name of Amala: "You do not need to be Hindu but a true Jewess. If Judaism does not satisfy you, no other faith will give you satisfaction for any length of time. I would advise you to remain a Jewess and appropriate the good of other faiths". Similarly, he would not want Miss Slade (Mirabehn) to become a Hindu.

their insights, not the least, the Scriptures of different religions. Thus his prayer services regularly included Scriptural passages and songs from different religions.⁹

We shall now address ourselves to our question: how are we to understand the love for God and love for fellowmen? We are not concerned here about God's love for man but rather man's love for God and his fellowmen. Is the love we have for God, qualitatively different from the love for fellowmen? Does the love for God lead one to love one's fellowmen or does the love for fellowmen lead one to love God? Are they so related that loving God in prayer and contemplation, accompanied by the fulfilment of simple daily tasks, is more than enough since my fellowmen are already contained in God? Or, is one to engage oneself totally in the service of fellowmen since loving our fellowmen, one loves God implicitly? Or, to put it in other words, is our love to be theocentric or anthropocentric? Or is it neither?

Again, we have the phenomenon of atheism of different types. Some claim themselves to be neither theists nor atheists and are plain agnostics. We can find among atheists, agnostics and the religiously indifferent, a love for fellowmen. Are we to condemn this as a false love, self-centred and with hidden motives of selfishness? Evidence seems to be contrary to such an assumption. In loving his fellowmen without any ulterior motive an atheist or agnostic seems to give a truer value to fellowmen than the theist who claims to love his fellowmen for love of God, and who thus degrades his fellowmen making them as means or mere instruments for a further end. On the other hand, the theist who is actively concerned about his fellowmen and stops in such an activity, seems to make of his theism just a nominalistic position or a ritual to be somehow gone through.

Perhaps it is necessary to enquire about the basis for such a love. On what do the atheists and agnostics base their love for fellowmen? Similarly, what is the basis for the love of God and fellowmen exhibited by the theists? As theists, and more specially as Christians, is our love for God and fellowmen to be based on the commandment to love? The command to love our enemies —is it so very unique to Christianity? We shall not treat exhaustively these questions, for that would need another dissertation. It would

⁹ Cf. above, p. 228.

suffice for us to highlight a few salient points and then see what we could incorporate from Gandhian insights.

First, we examine the Christian's basis for loving God and fellowmen. The recommendation to love God and fellowmen does not appear to be unique to the New Testament. Thus, V.P. Furnish in his book, **The Love Command in the New Testament**, marshals various evidences and studies to show that the 'Golden Rule' of do unto others what you would like others do unto you (Mt 7:12; Lk 6:31) is found in other non-biblical literature of the time, both among the Greeks and Jews (Rabbinical writings). It is found in the negative as well as in the positive formulation; even the futility of hating others is mentioned.¹⁰ The commandment as such, is found in the Old Testament (a Rabbinical combination of Dt 6:4-6 and Lv 19:18). What then is unique in Jesus' teaching about love for God and fellowmen? It appears that Jesus made this as central in his vision of the 'kingdom of God':

Jesus was not the first to formulate the love command. But it was his distinction to have made that command central within the context of his proclamation about the coming Rule of God, the Rule of divine Sovereign whose power is revealed in both his judgment and mercy.¹¹

There is also the question of the two commands: love for God and love for fellowmen, whether they are two or perhaps only one in reality. Anders Nygren, in **Agape and Eros**, takes exception to all attempts to reduce it into one:

... history of Christianity is full of attempts to make the two commandments into one. In general, the procedure has been to subsume neighbourly love under love for God. Men have started from the conviction that love for God is in the last resort the only legitimate form of Christian love. They have therefore thought it necessary to justify the demand for love to one's neighbour by showing that it is only another way of speaking of love for God. Hence the idea has been put forward—in very diverse forms—that Christians' love for his neighbour is not strictly directed to the neighbour but to God ... For "God in my neighbour"—as the common phrase goes.¹²

¹⁰ FURNISH, V.P., **The Love Command in the New Testament**, Nashville and New York, 1972, p. 59 sq.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹² NYGREN, A. **Agape and Eros**, (P. S. Watson, tr.), London, 1932, (vol. I part I), 1938 (vol. I, part II), 1939 (vol. II), revised, retranslated 1953, New York, 1969, p. 97-98.

He also mentions Calvin who wanted that what we love in neighbour should be not some good in him but rather the image of God, however, tarnished. Thus it is not the neighbour that is loved but God in the neighbour.¹³ Pierre Rousselot quotes Hugh of St. Victor:

*Proximus autem ideo propter Deum diligendus est, quia cum ipso in Deo est bonum nostrum ... Istum diligimus ut cum ipso curramus, et cum ipso perveniamus. Illum (Deum) ut gaudium, istum ut requiei consortem ... propter Deum, id est quia habet Deum; vel ... quia habiturus est eum; vel ut habeat eum.*¹⁴

There are also those who think that the command to love God is primary, if not the only real one, and the command to love the neighbour is secondary, which could perhaps be, at times, dispensed with. Victor Paul Furnish considers them (commandments) to be not set as primary and secondary but rather together forming a whole:

*I have on occasion heard Christian ministers criticize Christian social action on the ground that the Church's real business is 'religious' for Jesus' 'first' commandment is to love God, and one's duty to love the neighbor is only secondary. But this interpretation of the Great Commandment is entirely excluded by the context here (Mk 12:28-34). The two commands together are set over against all other requirements of the law.*¹⁵

He also mentions that opinions are divided regarding John's love ethic and notes that John seems, somehow, to narrow down the "love one another" to the circle of Christian community.¹⁶ Further examining the letters of James, Jude, II Peter, letter to the Hebrews and the writings of the apostolic Fathers, he concludes: "... more and more the love command is applied as community regulation by which unity, peace and charitable service for the needy can be maintained".¹⁷

¹³ NYGREN, A. *Agape and Eros*, p. 42 quotes from Calvin, *Institutes*, iii, 7.6.

¹⁴ ROUSSELOT, P., *Pour l'histoire du problème de l'amour au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1933, p. 46. "But the neighbour is to be, therefore, loved for God's sake, because our good is in God with him ... This one we love since we run with him and we reach with him. That One [God] [we love] as our joy and this one [neighbour] as a companion of joy; that One as rest and this one as a companion of rest ... for the sake of God, that is, because he has God or ... because he would have Him, or may have Him" (translation is mine).

¹⁵ FURNISH, V.P., *The Love Command in the New Testament*, p. 26-27; he also adduces here the support of SPICQ, *Agape in the New Testament*, I.64,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143 sq.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

Then again, Anders Nýgren takes a strong exception to the introduction of a supposed third commandment:

*... the two commandments are two only, and no third can be added to them ... there has arisen a strong tradition, which has found acceptance both in Catholic and Protestant theology, that three things are included in the Christian commandment of love: love for God, for oneself, and for one's neighbour.*¹⁸

He blames St. Augustine for such an introduction.¹⁹ To me, it seems to be a misnomer to call the love of oneself as a command. St. Augustine with rare insight into human psychology sees the love of oneself as a normal and natural drive which acts as a practical measure and guide to the love of the neighbour. He does not see it as a third command: "Love, therefore, your neighbour and look into yourself whereby you may love the neighbour; there (in the neighbour) you will see, if you can, God. Begin therefore to love the neighbour".²⁰ Though love of oneself is not a third commandment, a proper, well-ordered love of oneself has been considered as a prerequisite by many scholastic theologians for a genuine love for neighbour and for God. Pierre Rousselot simplifies by saying:

*Cette pensée peut se traduire en ces termes bien simples: Trouver Dieu, c'est trouver son âme quand on paraît la perdre et la sacrifier. Aimer Dieu et s'aimer, c'est la même chose.*²¹

A little further, speaking of love of self, the neighbour and God, he remarks:

*L'amour de soi, étant ainsi la condition générale de l'amour des autres, a la même amplitude que l'amour de Dieu. Comme d'ailleurs on l'a vu, aimer Dieu, c'est vouloir Dieu pour soi. Donc l'amour légitime de soi et l'amour de Dieu sont non seulement d'extension égale, mais rigoureusement identiques.*²²

¹⁸ NYGREN, A. *Agape and Eros*, p. 100.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 464 sq; cf. also the answer of CANNING, R., "Love Your Neighbour as Yourself", in *Augustiniana* 34 (1984) 145-197.

²⁰ AUGUSTINE, *Tractatus in Evangelium Ioannis* 17,8, in ML 35,1532: "Dilige ergo proximum, et intueri in te unde diligis proximum; ibi videbis, ut poteris Deum. Incipe ergo diligere proximum" (English translation is mine).

²¹ ROUSSELOT, P., *Pour l'histoire du problème de l'amour au Moyen Age*, p. 41. "This thought may be translated in these very simple terms: To discover God is to discover one's soul when one seems to lose and sacrifice it. To love God and love oneself, it is the same thing" (translation is mine).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 47. "The love of oneself being of the same general condition as love for others has the same extension as love of God. As we have previously seen, to love God means to want God for oneself. So legitimate love of oneself and love of God are not only of equal extension but also rigorously identical" (translation is mine).

M.C. D'Arcy is forthright in differing from Anders Nygren's view that a pure 'agapaic' love is possible:

He thinks that all traces of self must be removed. In demanding this he is asking the impossible. Not only is the language of love in its greatest transports, a mixture of joy in the beloved's happiness and joy in possessing his or her love, but pushed to the extreme a love in which the self did not enter would be no love at all ... The consequence of uprooting what Nygren calls egocentric love would be, if only he were to follow the logic of his thought, to extinguish human love altogether.²³

According to Nygren, Clement of Alexandria was one of those who initiated the idea that love of neighbour is actually love of God and part of the eros motif. Thus, he says, Clement of Alexandria interpreting the parable of the Good Samaritan, allegorically identifies the wounded man as Christ and so the neighbour is the Saviour Himself, with the consequence that in loving the neighbour we love God Himself.²⁴ He further develops the story of such an identification of God in man up to the Renaissance thinker Ficino who, according to him, speaks of man as being at the centre of the world and man is God upon earth; man's spirit is almost identical with God's Spirit.²⁵ Consequently, we have reached a stage where the basis for love of fellowmen seems to be man himself! We shall take up this consideration a little later.

We come across surprising interpretations as to who the neighbour is and what the 'Golden Rule' really implies. Thus says George H. Tavard in *A Way to Love*:

The disciples are expected to love all human persons. This traditional understanding of ethics of the Gospel constitutes the basic stance of the Christian Faith in the area of human relationships ... this can only mean that the disciples should have compassion for all, that they should be totally open to the upsurge of mercy for the misery of the universe and the universal anguish of human beings.²⁶

So the commandment of love for the neighbour is reduced to only compassion! For Tavard, this compassion is 'love' only in common parlance:

²³ D'ARCY, M.C., *The Mind and Heart of Love - Lion and Unicorn. A Study in Eros and Agape*, London, 1945, ²1946, p. 70.

²⁴ NYGREN, A. *Agape and Eros*, p. 366-367.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 674-677.

²⁶ TAVARD, G.H., *A Way to Love*, Maryknoll (NY), 1977, p. 55.

Popular parlance calls this 'love' or 'love for the neighbor'. Yet it would be better to speak of mercy and compassion. It makes love for the neighbor possible by creating neighborliness. My compassion makes me neighbor to others and worthy of neighbor's love.²⁷

He also mentions that as long as a relationship is not established, the other remains a nameless human being and not my neighbour:

A stranger who walks along the street is not my neighbor. He does not know me and I have never met him. He has not done anything to be neighbor. But if I establish a personal relationship with him through mercy, then I become his neighbor.²⁸

Thus, the commandment to love has been reduced to being a readiness to show compassion to those in need, whatever be the character or quality of the person in need.

Now we turn our attention, very briefly, to the basis of love for fellowmen as exhibited by professed atheists, agnostics and the religiously indifferent. Here we notice that God has disappeared from the scene and man has the stage. I love my fellowmen because they are like me, we belong to the same species, endowed with reason and free will. I am somehow moved to be concerned about them, there seems to be a moral imperative driving me to actions for the benefit of my fellowmen. The State or Commonweal seems to demand that I show this concern. I may have to sacrifice my life for the State, so that when I die in battle, defending the nation or its interests, my nation survives or when I am worn out in labouring for the State, the nation prospers. Maybe such an individual is also flattered by the prospect of being recognized by fellow citizens, even if it means a tinsel medal or a monument after he is dead. If it is not the State, then it is sometimes a few individuals or a class which succeeds in manipulating others for their own class interests. Then again it seems to be the height of self-interest when I am concerned about others. In labouring for others, I am only creating conditions for my privatized joy. It is but playing it safe. In the common good, my good is preserved!

Among the nations themselves, we can notice this kind of self-interest in an apparent show of concern for the poorer nations. Financial aid is poured in for development only in order to make the poorer nations more de-

²⁷ TAVARD, G.H., *A Way to Love*, p. 53.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44 and elsewhere.

pendent on the developed nations. The developed nations create the needs which they then go about trying to fulfil and the poorer nations fall into the trap. The powerful nations want a monopoly of nuclear arsenal, poison gas and other sophisticated weaponry so that they may not be threatened by those whom they dub as irrational or irresponsible. They would rather encourage wars (local) so that their obsolete weapons could be dumped, new ones tested and the concerned warring nations may waste their hard earned money. The list of woes could be extended but it suffices to stop here with the reflection that often enough all the aid that is given is not without strings attached. At the same time, this statement stands to be modified since one cannot deny the genuine interest shown in times of natural calamities when individuals and groups the world over, go to the aid of victims. The basis here seems to be that we all belong to the same human race and natural sympathy overflows at those times for our fellow human beings.

There is also the cry of: love needs no justification. Love is valid in itself. Indeed, a human being who cannot love is no human being. His very discovery of self is dependent on his interaction with his fellow human beings. It is through meaningful relationships that he grows to greater maturity. Where is then any place for God?²⁹ So the question of loving God does not arise. To be concerned about my fellowmen is part of my being human, it is a way of my growing up to fuller personhood, a fulfilment of a psychological need.

We now turn to Gandhi for his insights, as spelled out in the previous chapters. It is to be noted that no strict comparison can be instituted between the Eastern and Western concepts here. Often it happens that Western thinkers employ Western philosophical categories to judge the Eastern thought about God and world and tend to think that Indian philosophy or theology is pantheistic or monistic. Often I wonder whether the Western thinkers are juggling with Western concepts in their attempts to represent reality which somehow eludes them (despite the claims of some schools that they do represent reality adequately); the Eastern thinkers also do the same but leave the question open, claiming that Reality is beyond the expressions they use to describe 'It', and it is realized more through experiential and

²⁹ See DELESALLE, J. & VAN TOÀN, T., *Quand l'amour éclipse Dieu*, Paris, 1984, especially p. 159-164 and p. 238-243.

non-conceptual self-realization, for which they devise various means. However, this is not to subscribe to the celebrated quote from the English poet and writer, Rudyard Kipling, after he had spent some years in India:

*East is East and West is West
And never the twain shall meet*

Instead of comparison whereby the two sets of concepts are brought into confrontation, it is better to consider them apart within their own systems, allowing only the vibrations of one system to affect the other for further development. Nevertheless, we are constrained to use one set of concepts in discussion but one has to keep in mind their difference. Thus Gandhi himself, having been trained in the West and with wide Western contacts, uses Western concepts but always understands them in his Eastern setting.

That God exists and He is to be loved is no big problem for Gandhi. He was aware of atheists. His contact with them dates from the time he had spent in England as a student of law. He felt that there could not be a real atheist, even an atheist has values by which he stands. Truth is what all seek and an atheist is no exception and thus an atheist acknowledges God who is Truth. In this, his argument is reminiscent of St. Augustine's argument against Sceptics. In fact, in many ways, Gandhi's quest after Truth resembles St. Augustine's. But Gandhi seems to go a step further when he declares that for him Truth is God. Truth is not merely an attribute of God but the very Being of God.³⁰ This, of course, he says, because Truth means Reality and Reality (*Sat*) 'is', while anything outside of Reality is not. Thus, Truth is fundamental, which even an atheist cannot deny since the very denial will prove the quest for Truth. We could agree with Shivesh C. Thakur when he says:

*In the course of his long and extraordinarily active life Gandhi said and wrote a tremendous amount. But I think it is possible to compress his entire philosophy into literally one word. Most people might imagine that this would be 'non-violence' (ahimsā), but I believe that it has to be 'truth'. It is this word that imparts meaning and justification to everything else Gandhi stood for.*³¹

³⁰ See above, p. 110-112 and elsewhere.

³¹ THAKUR, S.C., "Gandhi's God", in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1971) 485-495, p. 485.

That God is to be loved is also a natural consequence since one cannot seek with eagerness what one does not love. His was a commitment to Truth, a loyalty to Truth which is not to be shaken at any time. All the vows he took and recommended have this commitment to Truth as a basis. Thus, one of the first *satyāgraha* fasts he undertook in India (in 1917) was when the Mill-hands of Ahmedabad were beginning to waver and prove false to the commitment they had given.³² In his dealings with the Governments in South Africa and India, he stood for Truth. He would not take advantage of the opponent or seek to destroy him but would rather trust him, hoping for Truth, which he loved, to triumph through a conversion of the opponent. The result of such a conversion is not a generation of hatred but an increase of love and respect for one another at the end of the contest.

Truth-God, whom he loved and was committed to, was perceived in different ways by different people. Hence he would not condemn those who were accustomed to idol-worship. He would say that it is but a psychological phenomenon and a part of the natural human tendency. What is important is the Reality (*sat*), Truth which is worshipped beneath the images. He would not even call them polytheists but rather consider their approach as different appellations for the One Truth-God. On the contrary, even a monotheist who decries idol-worship, may, in fact, be practising unconscious idol-worship when he thinks God is present *only* in his church, mosque, Bible or Koran.³³

The commitment to Truth-God, which he practised, leads him to the love of his fellowmen. Reality (*Sat*) is basically one and his fellowmen are but a part of Truth-God, of Reality (*Sat*).³⁴ They are His visible manifestation, highest of all material creatures and highest of all living creatures. Among his fellowmen there cannot be high or low. All have a basic human dignity

³² Cf. p. 35; see above regarding other occasions, p. 117.

³³ Cf. above p. 49-50; 126.

³⁴ Cf. above p. 15-16; 52-53 and elsewhere; RICHARDS, G., *The Philosophy of Gandhi*, Totowa (NJ), 1982, ²1983, p. 161; IYER, N.R., *The Moral and Political Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 92-93; CHATTERJEE, Margaret, *Gandhi's Religious Thoughts*, p. 102-107; PANIKKAR, R., "Advaita and Bhakti, Love and Identity in a Hindu-Christian Dialogue", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (Spring 1970) 299-309; RICHARDS, G., "Gandhi's Concept of truth and the Advaita", in *Religious Studies* 22 (March 1986) 1-14; RAO, S.K.L., "Mahatma Gandhi and Christianity", in (Sharma, A., ed.), *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity*, Leiden, 1988, p. 143-155.

which is to be valued. All along he kept this in mind and any attack made on the dignity of man would rouse him to oppose such an indignity with all the means available. It was part of this stand that made him engage in various items of his constructive programmes. He could not bear to see any of his countrymen feel helpless. It was this that moved him to introduce the spinning wheel as a symbol of self-help and part of a discovery of one's capacity. He saw God's manifestation in the poor as *Daridranārāyana* (God in the form of the poor) but poverty is not to be praised for its own sake, nor tolerated when it makes one to lose one's dignity and live under oppression. Something can be done about it and the sooner the better. We need not be helpless.³⁵

If human beings realized their oneness, their solidarity in Truth-God, there would be no room for violent quarrels. Truth was something towards which all tend and no one can claim to possess it fully. Hence all that one has or reaches up to is partial truth. There is no point in quarreling about it. In the context of India, where various religions existed side by side, he would decry any competition among them. Truth is not the private possession of any one religion. He would not want any vilification of one another's religion; nor would he want any conversion. He was very suspicious of Christian missionaries trying to proselytize. The lurking suspicion seems to have had a political overtone also. The British had already given a separate electorate for the Muslims and had been thwarted in 1931, by his fast unto death, from giving the same privilege to the Harijans. Dr. Ambedkar, the Harijan leader had advocated that the Harijans become Buddhists. Gandhi felt that all these would only create more divisions and groupings. Hence his stand was that there should not be any conversion from one religion to another since all religions are branches of the one tree —Truth. He would want everyone to remain in and practise his own religion, growing deeper in the realization of Truth. He would want openness among religions so that they could learn from one another. This is not to say he would deny that someone could justifiably change over to another religion from conviction. He would rather consider this to be very rare, whereas his suspicion was that often conversions are only so-called conversions and had base motives. His own conviction was that any religion was good enough if but one learns to deepen one's vision and remain open to various influences.

³⁵ See above, p. 24-25; 223-224; 226; 162-165.

Gandhi's idea here is a common view of many a Hindu, for whom religion is not a set of dogmas or truths to be believed in but a way of life belonging to a particular culture; and hence leaving Hinduism, appears to a Hindu, to be an act of turning back upon one's culture and people.

Violent conflicts do occur among human beings. How are conflicts to be resolved? Gandhi advocated that they could be resolved by using the principle of *ahimsā* or love-force. Love of one's fellowmen cannot remain silent in the face of violent conflicts which are a part of falsehood. It is a falsehood because one has not realized that no one has a monopoly of truth. Conflicts arise out of real injustices, prejudices and false pride. What then becomes crucial is the needed honesty in seeking the truth in the spirit of *ahimsā*. (this is nothing else but the search for Truth-God Whom he loved and to Whom he was committed). Gandhi's methodology, as we had already pointed out, was to first make a spot enquiry, collect the data (he often felt that there are hidden motives: in Noakhali, where there was Hindu-Muslim conflict, the reason was ostensibly religious but the hidden reason he found was that the Muslims, who were the majority, were poor and oppressed by the minority who were rich Hindu land-lords and merchants), weigh the pros and cons and once the injustice has been perceived, he would start the procedure of appealing to the oppressor to mend his ways. His aim was to make the one in the wrong to see that he was in the wrong. He felt that once this was perceived, injustice would stop; Truth (Truth-God) would triumph. It was this insistence on truth (*satya*) that he termed *satyāgraha*. When the oppressor refuses to budge (because he does not see the injustice) in spite of all appeals and persuasions, the *satyāgrahi* engages in *satyāgraha* by which he undergoes suffering in love,³⁶ the highest form of which is fasting unto death where one is ready to lay down one's life for one's fellowmen. Gandhi's conviction was that such a genuine *satyāgraha* cannot fail to have its good effect in making the oppressor perceive his injustice and vacate it, thus letting Truth triumph.³⁷ There is no hatred of the oppressor since the oppressor is also a human being and part of the One Reality. The oppressor also needs to reach Truth-God. If the expected result does not take place,

³⁶ Cf. DOUGLASS, J.W., *The Non-violent Cross*, London, 1968, p. 54 and p. 71, where he speaks of Gandhi's 'suffering love' and sees its connection with the Christian idea of suffering. Confer also the chapters above where we speak of *satyāgraha*.

³⁷ Cf. above, p. 27-28; 74-76; 175-178; 236-237.

Gandhi would say that something was wrong with the *satyāgraha* engaged in and it would not be genuine. Accordingly, he himself halted some of the movements he had set in motion: especially memorable is the wrong fast and false *satyāgraha* he engaged in at Rajkot in 1939.³⁸ All have to search for Truth-God and the genuine *satyāgrahi's* action is motivated by *ahimsā* or love-force towards even the oppressor.

Of value is his oft-repeated assertion that even one genuine *satyāgrahi* is enough to bring about the desired change in a particular situation. He humbly declaimed that he himself was not a perfect one since he failed to keep down his temper and thus was wanting in the spirit of perfect *ahimsā* which is essential for a true *satyāgrahi*. It was partly in order to test the perfection of his *ahimsā*, he had undertaken his questionable *brahmaçārya* experiment during the last stage. But what holds our attention is his assertion that even one man's action could affect the whole society. It is understandable when we pay attention to his fundamental thesis of oneness of all reality and the way in which every individual being is linked to others around him and to all. Thus we somehow affect the surroundings for good or for bad. It was his belief that if he were to succeed and win in the test of *ahimsā* in his *brahmaçārya* experiment, he would be generating so much *ahimsā* around him that the Hindu-Muslim struggle which was then going on, would be resolved in a triumph for Truth. I hold that Gandhi was mistaken in this his peculiar experiment but the value, as I have noted down, is his conviction that an individual could affect the society for better or for worse.

But now it should also be obvious to the reader that Gandhi's love for Truth-God and fellowmen is not merely in words but in deeds, in earnest, *sustained action*. Perhaps this was and is the lasting significance of Gandhi for India. It is a permanent temptation for her people to forget this lesson. While non-violence was not new in Indian lore, *satyāgraha* was new, and that too, the element of *sustained action* within *satyāgraha* is of great value in the Indian context. It is, however, doubtful whether this is perceived by all in India today. Let me try to clarify this a little. Letting things drift is a common temptation for an average person in India. This is, perhaps, due to the cyclical notion of life that pervades. Given the inexorable law of *karma*,

³⁸ Cf. above, p. 106; 186-187.

the futility of action, indeed the undesirability of action is adhered to. A feeling of helplessness grips one and makes one more and more passive, letting things take their 'normal' course. Gandhi, perhaps due to his Western contact, attacked this in subtle ways. He needed scriptural backing and found it in the *Gītā*. The *Gītā*, he discovered, does not advocate inaction but vigorous action and the evil consequences, if any, could be escaped when the needed action is done without any attachment to the fruits thereof (*niṣkāma-karma*).³⁹ Thus Gandhi engaged himself in multifarious action on behalf of his fellowmen. This service, he constantly reminded his followers, was to be done with humility.

In line with Buddha and as a part of the Indian heritage, he advocated a reduction of one's needs. He did not want India to imitate the West in its rapid and uncontrolled industrialization uprooting the people from their villages. He wanted his people to avoid the mistakes of the West. He pleaded for self-contained villages with a decentralized administration and a genuine grass-root democracy. We could notice that here again we have his fundamental thought: there ought not to be a feeling of helplessness and letting things drift (this would be falsehood and against truth). The villages must stand on their own legs and not become serfs of big industrial towns and be slavishly subject to a distant central government. Villagers must discover their own strength and dignity. All these involved sustained constructive action. It was a vision of a society where there is love, mutual respect, dignity and cooperation. No doubt, this was for him, a part of his quest for Truth (Truth-God), as everything has to be genuine in a well-ordered society.

Self-realization is the dream of every serious-minded Indian. Various paths had been traditionally advocated: the ways of knowledge, action and devotion. Gandhi tries to combine the three but gives prominence to action. There had been repeated suggestions that he retire to the Himalayas or elsewhere to seek self-realization.⁴⁰ But, for him, self-realization has to be achieved in the midst of constructive action. He considered this to be his *dharma* or duty. It was but a participation in an action with God. The traditional notion had held that when *adharma* (unlawfulness, unrighteous-

³⁹ Cf. above, p. 200-201; 154-155.

⁴⁰ Cf. above, p. 89-90; 200-201; 244-246.

ness, wickedness) had increased in the world, and the *ṛta* (the even rhythm of the universe) had been disturbed, God comes down as an *avatār* (apparent incarnation) to restore the right order and establish *dharma* once again.⁴¹ Gandhi's insight would be that we do not just keep quiet and wait for God to intervene and accomplish this task but rather we cooperate with God in this task. It is however to be remembered that many simple people considered Gandhi himself as an *avatār* and they revered him so in spite of all his protests.⁴² It is also worth noting that the traditional category of restoring *dharma* blends here with the Gandhian perspective of discovering Truth, restoring Truth, destroying falsehood, injustice and oppression. (We have already noted above the method of doing this, namely, *satyāgraha* in the spirit of *ahimsā*. Compare this with the description of traditional *avatārs* where the evil person is destroyed to restore *dharma*).

His preoccupation with sustained action did not make him blind to the need for prayer. Prayer played an important part in his life. He was faithful to daily prayer both in common and in private. Indeed, he would advocate constant prayer using the traditional *Rāmanāma* or repetition of God's name in the silence of one's heart as one engages oneself in work. This faith in Truth-God (*Satya*) and its connection with *satyāgraha*, he expressed in his demand that his *satyāgrahis* should be believers in Truth-God. Without such a faith, he felt, it would be impossible to be a genuine *satyāgrahi*.⁴³ A life of prayer, if it meant laziness, was for him a deception. Hence, he decried the habit of many *sādhus* who were lazy, begging their food and he asked them to earn their livelihood while showing genuine detachment. He would like them to take up spinning and thus give a lead to the people. Gandhi did what he preached; he engaged himself in daily sacrificial spinning (his bread-labour) in spite of his heavy schedule.

Ahimsā or love was the spirit in which one engages in all actions. It does not seek to destroy the opponent but aims at his conversion. What is destroyed is only the evil, the injustice and the oppression. In keeping with the tradition of his province, he extended this spirit of *ahimsā* to include all

⁴¹ Cf. the *Gita* 4, 6-8.

⁴² Cf. above, p. 41-42.

⁴³ Cf. above, p. 175-176.

reality, all beings both inanimate and animate. Various events enabled him to modify this vision.⁴⁴ Environmentalists could find in him an ardent and ready patron since he was very careful about the preservation of the environment. After all, it was part of Reality, Truth (*Satya*) and he could not but seek the restoration of Truth in all its glory.

Reverting now to the questions we raised at the beginning of this chapter, if we asked Gandhi whether love for God and love for fellowmen is the same, his answer would be unequivocal: it is the same.⁴⁵ The Truth-God, Whom we seek, is beyond every description and He could be found in our fellowmen, especially the poor and the oppressed. Some have wondered admiringly that the reason why the Israelites were forbidden to fashion any dead idol or image for divinity was the fact that God wanted them to discover Him in the living man.⁴⁶ Gandhi, too, discovers God in the living but suffering, oppressed man. It was, at the same time, a call for action—for cooperation with God in the restoration of *dharma* and in that very activity to find one's self-realization. For Gandhi, however, such a self-realization meant a realization of the fundamental unity of Being in spite of all distinctions.

This leads us to the second question whether this sameness is to be conceived so strictly as to be identical. Though it is the same one movement of love, God and man are not identical: one is the Originator and the other is the originated.⁴⁷ Duties towards God are not exactly the same as duties towards fellowmen, though doing one's duty to fellowmen is part of doing one's duty to God.⁴⁸ Thus he would say that if God were to be found else-

⁴⁴ Cf. above, p. 239-244; 192-193; 85-86.

⁴⁵ Cf. above, p. 197-198.

⁴⁶ DELESALLE, J., & VAN TOÀN, T., *Quand l'amour éclipse Dieu*, p. 221: "Les spécialistes des religions ont été frappés de ce qu'Israël est le seul peuple qui n'ait pas façonné d'idoles de la divinité. Mais on oublie souvent que pour Israël, précisément, la seule image qui puisse donner une idée de Dieu, c'est l'homme, la créature qui couronne toute l'œuvre créatrice. La seule icône de Dieu, c'est l'homme vivant, considéré en lui-même et aussi, nous l'avons annoncé, dans sa relation à autrui ... L'homme vivant est la seule image qui, dans le monde créé, puisse valablement signifier le divin".

⁴⁷ I have avoided the terms 'creator' and 'creature' since they have to be understood differently in the Indian context. The Supreme *Brahman* does not create but it is only his manifestation, the *Īśvara* who 'creates' but not 'ex nihilo'.

⁴⁸ Cf. above, p. 146-151.

where, he would hurry there. He was convinced that God could be found only in the midst of service to others.⁴⁹ Thus the two services are kept separate but not divorced from one another, the one leads to the other. It is a blending of both, which makes him assert time and again, that our various activities are not to be compartmentalized. He would not like to make a dichotomy of spiritual and non-spiritual activities. It was thus that he was able to integrate his political activities into the one constant aim of his life—the search for Truth, for God, for Truth-God as he would call it. It is as Christian mystics would say: a living constantly in the presence of God (he had an appreciation for the mystic Br. Lawrence⁵⁰), which he would term as being true and seeking 'Truth' in all that we do and say.

By far, the element that has struck many is his insistence on non-violence and a spirit of forgiveness. But what is forgotten is the way in which he understands non-violence. It is not simply an absence of violence. He called it *ahimsā* and described it, above all, as love-force. It has, though expressed negatively (it is a common method in Indian thought to express negatively what cannot be expressed in positive terms), a positive connotation. As love-force, it pervades all of one's thoughts and actions. Again, what is forgotten by many is the insistence he makes about the way *ahimsā* and truth are connected.⁵¹ Truth is the end which all are seeking and *ahimsā* is the way to reach it. He slowly moved on to insist that *ahimsā* is the only way. In fact, he considered that all other ways, namely different vows and ascetical practices are subsumed under *ahimsā* which leads to Truth.⁵² At one stage (1930), he had said that we do not know Truth perfectly but *ahimsā* we knew but could not practise it fully. Later (1940), in the context of World War II, he began to doubt whether we knew *ahimsā* fully and still later, during the communal violence in connection with the partition of the Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan, he realized how very changing the implications of *ahimsā* could be in practice. It was for this

⁴⁹ Cf. above p. 199.

⁵⁰ Lawrence of the Resurrection (Herman Nicholas), a Discalced Carmelite lay brother and mystic, 1611-1691.

⁵¹ Cf. above, p. 86, 193-194.

⁵² Cf. above, his diagram and explanation on p. 194.

reason that he continued to refuse the writing down of any treatise on *ahimsā*, though he was urged to do so by some.

The spirit of forgiveness which he practised and inculcated is also a part of *ahimsā* and thus a part of his quest for Truth. If Truth is not the monopoly of any one individual and if what is given us is only different perspectives and partial truths, it is but right to concede that another person has a right to his perception of truth. Gandhi also acknowledged that it is possible for one to be in error and he generously acknowledged his own mistakes. Hence there was room for forgiveness. What we ought not to forget is the goal he had in view, though dimly. Truth was a goal that pervades his whole life; the 'experiments' which he conducted (that is how he named his **Autobiography**) were designed to lead to Truth. He claimed that his discovery of *ahimsā* as the only way to Truth was valid for all times and all peoples. He set out to prove its validity by employing it in India. His fond hope was that once it was proved in India, it would be acknowledged the world over. Until this was accomplished, he refused all invitations from abroad to lecture about his methods.

Looking beyond Gandhi here, we should notice that love (he sometimes said that it is what *ahimsā* is all about but had not called it as love for fear of confusing it with the popular and at times debasing connotations) is a means.⁵³ In the Christian perspective, love is not only a means but an end. Love somehow seems to lose its meaning when we ask what it is for. We are not to love someone for the sake of someone or something. This somehow degrades the person whom we want to love. One who loves genuinely, is launching into a process which ever grows and never wearies. It is at the same time a risk since it could involve suffering and pain but because one loves, one is ready to go through it, wishing but the good of the one loved. Thus love can be and ought to be a permanent reality. That is how St. Paul sees love that persists (ICor 13:1-13; Gandhi was fond of this passage and meditated on it during the Champaran struggle in 1917). In Trinitarian theology, the Person of the Holy Spirit is described as Subsistent Love, the love of the Father to the Son and the love of the Son to the Father. In this very dynamic inner movement of Love, the Trinity projects for us a vision of Love

⁵³ At times, he considered that Truth and *ahimsā* are two sides of the same coin, sometimes he would put them on equal footing but he always ended up by saying that he prefers to consider that Truth is the end and *ahimsā* is the means.

as an ongoing goal. Here we notice that Love is paradoxically a continuous movement (process) and an end at the same time. Thus answering one of the questions we raised about the basis of love, we could say that there is no need for a basis of love beyond love itself. God, Who is Truth, has instilled into our hearts His Spirit Who is Subsistent Love and it is in this God-given gift of Love we love. We ought not to say that it is a gift given to a chosen few among theists but a gift that is open to all who would welcome it explicitly or implicitly. Consequently, it is open to all, even to an atheist, agnostic or anyone of any category. Gandhi also believed that it is by *ahimsā* man becomes man and is above animals. He also believed, therefore, that all men could be trained in the practice of *ahimsā*,⁵⁴ lead happy, contented lives of service to one another and thus reach final Truth.

In conclusion, it may not be out of place, to mention Paul F. Knitter's contention that we have experienced a Copernican Revolution in turning from a long standing Ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism and he advocates a Theocentrism as a model for the future.⁵⁵ I would go a step further and say that what Gandhi advocated could be described as Cosmocentrism,⁵⁶ but in an Indian sense, where the lines between Theocentrism and Cosmocentrism is blurred *but not destroyed*. This provides an excellent basis for the theists, atheists, agnostics and the religiously indifferent. What do we mean by this? It means an assertion that Reality is basically one despite its 'many-ness'. You may call this One Reality (*Sat*) as God, Rāma, Rahīm, Baghavān or Allah. For Gandhi, it did not matter what name one used, the Reality is the same. He himself would prefer to call 'It' as Truth. It did not even matter whether one spoke of this One Reality as personal or impersonal. His position was not that of an inclusive monotheist, in the sense of each cultural deity being a different aspect of One God whereby one could even speak of different perceptions, but he would rather consider all these as mere

⁵⁴ Cf. above, p. 189-190 and elsewhere.

⁵⁵ KNITTER, P.F., *No Other Name?*, New York, 1985.

⁵⁶ This is not to say that I agree with Gandhi wholesale in what follows here. I am only trying to interpret Gandhi here by using this model. We cannot forget that a sense of history or acceptance of any historical revelation is absent, which is of little or no relevance for him as well as for most Indians. Towards the end he uses an interesting expression 'evolutionary revolution' (cf. above p. 233) by which he seems to connote a slow patient process towards righting of all wrongs, towards fullness of Truth (resulting in love and peace) as opposed to the sudden, violent revolutions which bring in hatred.

names that people use culturally to denote the essential One Reality, Truth. Everyone and everything, in his view, is connected in a network of relatedness (though Indian philosophy would, under another aspect, consider all relations as part of *māyā* or illusion). We are called to realize this oneness that transcends apparent divisions (though preserving distinctions in a special sense). In practice, this means that we are concerned about one another and about everything around us in a spirit of *ahimsā*. If there is injustice, if there is *adharma* which destroys the right order, the *ṛta* of the universe, destroying the harmonious relatedness of everything that is fundamentally one and not in opposition, then we have to work for the restoration of *dharma*, using *satyāgraha* in a spirit of *ahimsā*. This was for Gandhi, in my opinion, a concrete expression of love for God and for fellowmen.

“AHIMŚĀ PARAMŌ DHARMA”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ A free translation could be: “Love is the supreme law”. Cf. *Mahābhārata* Adhiparva, XI,13.

Glossary

<i>abhaya</i>	fearlessness
<i>adharma</i>	unlawful, not righteous, disturbance of the right order; opposite of <i>dharma</i>
<i>advaita</i>	philosophical position of non-dualism much advocated by the philosopher Sankaracarya [a complex notion*]
<i>āgraha</i>	firmness, insistence
<i>ahimsā</i>	literally, non-hurting. Gandhi gave various connotations to it, such as soul-force, love-force, means to truth [a complex notion]
<i>anēkāntavāda</i>	a philosophical position whereby one holds the non-unitary nature of reality; also called <i>syādvāda</i> . [a complex notion]
<i>anēkāntavādin</i>	one who holds the philosophical position of <i>anēkāntavāda</i>
<i>Antyāja</i>	one of the so-called low castes, untouchables in West India
<i>aparigraha</i>	non-possession or poverty
<i>Ārya Samājists</i>	an extremist Hindu-Revival group founded in 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883)
<i>aṣṭāṅgikamārgha</i>	the eight-fold path for liberation advocated by Buddha
<i>āśram (āshram)</i>	a place where those who seek self-realization gather round a <i>guru</i> or holy man and lead a simple, community life of prayer and penance. In Gandhi's <i>āśrams</i> it was prayer and work
<i>āśramite</i>	one who belongs to an <i>āśram</i>
<i>asteya</i>	non-stealing
<i>asvada</i>	control of the palate
<i>Ātman</i>	interpretatively the Supreme Being from the angle of the Highest Self [a complex notion and distinguished from <i>ātman</i> in small letters]
<i>ātman</i>	interpretatively the soul, essence of life, the spirit of God in man [a complex notion]
<i>Avatār</i>	God coming down into the world in a bodily form (apparent incarnation)
<i>Bania</i>	name of a merchant caste (Gandhi belonged to a sub-caste of this, called the <i>Mōdhbanias</i>)
<i>Bhangi</i>	a caste of sweepers, considered as untouchables and of low-caste
<i>bhajans</i>	repetitive singing of simple phrases as a prayer form, accompanied by clapping or use of cymbals and other simple musical instruments
<i>bhakti</i>	devotion; one of the ways to obtain salvation
<i>brahmaçārya</i>	literally, it meant the state of someone dwelling in the <i>Brahman</i> . It meant also the first stage of life when one is a student; derivatively, it means a life of chastity or continence

* The phrase "a complex notion" is attached to some of the phrases to indicate those phrases or words which bear different meanings in different situations and are difficult to translate.

<i>Brahman</i>	Ultimate Reality; the Supreme 'It', the Substratum of all that 'Is'
<i>Brāhmin</i>	a member of the highest of the four castes
<i>chappātis</i>	flattened, roasted thin bread
<i>charkhā</i>	the spinning wheel
<i>Dalit</i>	the oppressed; a common name given to the so-called low-castes, coined by Swami Sharaddanand
<i>Daridranārāyaṇa</i>	God in the form of the poor; <i>daridra</i> means destitution and <i>nārāyaṇa</i> is another name for <i>viṣṇu</i>
<i>darśan</i>	literally, appearance; vision; sight of a holy person, thing or place
<i>dāsānudāsa</i>	servant of servants; <i>dāsā</i> means servant
<i>dharma</i>	duty, law, right order, righteousness etc. [a complex notion]
<i>Dhed</i>	one of the so-called low-castes in West India
<i>dikṣa</i>	rite of initiation through a religious ceremony for one entering an ascetical life
<i>durāgrahi</i>	one who perseveres with an evil insistence and intent; opposite of <i>satyāgrahi</i>
<i>dvaitism</i>	a philosophical position holding to dualism in nature, especially advocated by the philosopher Ramanuja [a complex notion]
<i>Gaṇeś</i>	a Hindu god with an elephant's head, son of <i>Śiva</i>
<i>Gāyatri mantra</i>	prayer of the higher caste, orthodox Hindus, recited daily at sunrise and sunset. A <i>Vēdic</i> hymn invoking the creative energy of the sun. Cf. <i>Rg-Vēda</i> , III, 62, 10.
<i>ghēe</i>	butter-oil
<i>Gītā (Bhagavad Gītā)</i>	(Song of the Lord) song; a literary composition with philosophico-ethical teaching, a later addition to <i>Mahābhārata</i>
<i>gñāna</i>	literally, knowledge; way of contemplation in order to obtain salvation
<i>guru</i>	spiritual teacher who has reached self-realization and is fit to guide others on the path of self-realization
<i>harijans</i>	literally, God's people. Gandhi used this new word to denote all the so-called low-castes. It is also the name of the newspaper he edited from 1933
<i>himsā</i>	violence, hurting; opposite of <i>ahimsā</i>
<i>karma</i>	act, action, necessary effect of action; the law of merit-demerit with the consequence of rebirth in accordance with it; derivatively, it also means fate [a complex notion]
<i>karmayōgin</i>	one who practises the path of good actions, austerities as a way to salvation
<i>khādi</i>	hand-spinning, hand-spun cloth
<i>khaddar</i>	hand-spun cloth
<i>Khilāfat</i>	derived from the word Caliphate. The spiritual rule of the Caliph upheld by most of the Indian Muslims prior to its abolition; a name given to the movement to pressurize the British (after World War I) to restore the Caliph's authority in Palestine
<i>Khudai khidmatgars</i>	Servants of God, a name given to the group formed by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan in Northwest Frontier Provinces among the Pathans

<i>kriya</i>	action
<i>Kṛṣṇa</i>	a Hindu deity, an <i>avatār</i> (apparent 'incarnation') of <i>visnu</i>
<i>Kṣatriyas</i>	caste of warriors (second of the four castes)
<i>Mahābhārata</i>	classical, epic story of the fight between five brothers (<i>Paṇḍavās</i>) on one side and their hundred cousins (<i>Kauravās</i>) on the other. It is very long and contains many additions of stories within the story. Earliest part was composed around the 8th century BC
<i>mantra</i>	prayer, incantation, magic, powerful formula, casting of a spell
<i>mōkṣa</i>	heaven, liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth [a complex notion]
<i>māyā</i>	the principle causing illusions, appearances, a magical power of God [a complex notion]
<i>namāz</i>	Muslim prayer recited five times a day facing Mecca
<i>nirguṇa</i>	without attributes; Nirguṇa Brahman: God who is without attributes
<i>niṣkāmakarma</i>	action done without attachment to the fruits thereof
<i>pāpa</i>	sin
<i>punya</i>	merits of good deeds
<i>pardah</i>	custom among traditional women in North India and generally among the Muslim women to be veiled in front of strangers (men)
<i>pūrṇa svarāj</i>	full independence; complete self-rule
<i>rahīm</i>	one of the attributes (compassion) of <i>Allah</i> and here a substantive vocation for <i>Allah</i>
<i>Rāma</i>	a Hindu deity, <i>avatār</i> of <i>viṣṇu</i> ; historically the son of Dasarata, a king of Ayodhya; hero of <i>Rāmāyana</i>
<i>rāmanāma</i>	repetition of <i>Rāma</i> 's name continuously as a form of prayer
<i>Rāmarājya</i>	kingdom of <i>Rāma</i> . Gandhi translated it as 'kingdom of God'
<i>Rāmāyana</i>	classical epic (final composition around the first century BC) portraying <i>Rāma</i> and his exploits
<i>rāmdhun</i>	rhythmic repetition of <i>Rāma</i> 's name accompanied by clapping or the use of small cymbals
<i>ṛta</i>	rhythm, the harmony that rules the world
<i>sadāgraha</i>	an enduring or permanent state of firmness in resistance
<i>sādhu</i>	a renunciant, wandering mendicant in search of self-realization
<i>saguṇa</i>	with attributes; <i>Saguṇa Brahman</i> : God who is with attributes
<i>sainnyasa (sannyāsa)</i>	the life of a renunciant, ascetic, fourth stage of life
<i>sainnyāsin (sannyāsin)</i>	a renunciant who has taken up <i>sahnyāsa</i>
<i>sahdhya</i>	prescribed set of Vedic prayers
<i>Saraswati</i>	a Hindu goddess of learning portrayed wearing a white dress, holding a <i>vīṇa</i>
<i>śāstra</i>	sacred laws or ancient prescriptions for right conduct
<i>śāstri</i>	one well versed in the <i>śāstras</i> .
<i>sat</i>	being; reality; good, true [a complex notion]
<i>satya</i>	truth; also at times meaning promise; truthfulness

satyāgraha	literally, the firmness in holding on to truth at all costs
satyāgrahi	one who holds on to <i>satyāgraha</i>
ślōkas	Sanskrit versicles
śhitaprajña	one who has equipoise in life, is unattached and untroubled
śūdras	caste of agriculturists, artisans (last of the four castes)
swadeśhi (swadeśi)	literally, it means of one's own country; derivatively, it means the policy of using local products in preference to what is produced further away
swāmijis	a class of pious renunciants holding the position of religious teachers
swarāj	literally, it means self-rule; derivatively, it means independence and perhaps even liberation
Swarājists	a political party founded around 1924 which advocated partial cooperation with the British by entering into Legislative Councils and by working towards a dominion status for India
tila	musical beat; keeping of time in music by either clapping or use of musical instruments
tapas	austerities, penance
tapasçūrya	an exercise (or set of exercises) of austerity or penance in order to obtain a boon
Vaiṣṇavite	worshipper of Viṣṇu, a Hindu deity
Vaiśyas	caste of merchants (third of the four castes).
Vēdas	most ancient of Hindu Scriptures in Sanskrit, poetic metres and considered as God's revelation. It consists of four collections belonging to different centuries before Christ. <i>Ṛg Vēda</i> , the earliest was composed around the thirteenth century BC (at the latest).
vīna	a kind of stringed musical instrument
Viṣṇu	a Hindu deity, one of the Trimurti or the three principal gods of Hinduism
yajña	sacrifice, sacrificial act to obtain a boon or acquire power
yamaniyama	vows, rules and regulations of self-control enjoined by the <i>śāstras</i> for spiritual aspirants
yōga	science of bodily (and mental) discipline to acquire self-mastery
yōgin	one who is proficient in <i>yōga</i>
zamīndār	land owner. The <i>zamīndāri</i> system, under the British, involved a tax-collection contract. From a given area of which the <i>zamīndār</i> was responsible, he gave a fixed amount to the British as taxes and he was left undisturbed to realize whatever amount he pleased from his tenants over whom he had considerable authority

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